

INDIA AND WEST ASIA

MEA Distinguished Lecture Series
University of Goa, July 14, 2015

By

**Ambassador Rajendra
Abhyankar**

Chairman, Kunzru Centre for Defence Studies and Research, Pune
Professor of Practice of Diplomacy and Public Affairs, School of Public and
Environmental Affairs, Indiana University, Bloomington



WEST ASIA



**TO THE WEST OF INDIA WE
SEE FOUR DISTINCT
CIVILISATIONS:**

- ARAB**
- PERSIAN**
- JEWISH**
- TURKISH**

**WITH EACH INDIA HAS HAD A
UNIQUE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP**

WEST ASIA NOT MIDDLE EAST

Concentric Circles of Proximity

Afghanistan, GCC, Iraq, Iran, Yemen

- with the Arab world predominantly trade and investment, remittances and Diaspora, hydro carbons
- with Afghanistan assistance, terror and drugs

Mashreq , (West Asia), Turkey and Central Asia

- predominantly political with trade and investment as a focus for Turkey and CA

Maghreb(Mediterranean) Djibouti, Sudan, Somalia

- political and security, economic, hydro carbons

I. CONTOURS OF INDIA'S POLICY

***'FOR INDIA WEST ASIA IS THE REGION TO
AUGMENT ITS POWER RATHER THAN TO DISPLAY
OR ASSERT IT'
PROF. GIRIJESH PANT***

**-FIRST 3 FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS AFTER
INDEPENDENCE RELATED TO WEST ASIA:**

- 1.KHILAFAT MOVEMENT (TURKEY)
2. UNSCOP, 1948 (ISRAEL)
- 3.STATE OF ISRAEL

-ISLAM AND INDIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY
- MECCA AND MEDINA FOR HAJ AND
- NAJAF AND KARBALA TO THE SHIÁS

EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S POLICY

From Islamic prism and Arab solidarity to Investment, Energy and Security and back to Islamic prism

Major underpinnings:

Friendly relations through shared history and culture

Support to the Palestine cause

Equidistance in regional conflicts

Desire to play an effective role

Oppose exclusivist religious ideologies and fanaticism

Develop trade, economic and investments

Energy security

2. REGION IN CRISIS SINCE 9/11 -

- effect of US's wars in :**
 - AFGHANISTAN (2001-2014)**
 - IRAQ (2003-2011)**
- sectarian conflict following the 'Arab Spring' leaving region in political, societal and economic turmoil**
- competing radical Islamic groups like ISIL feeding a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia**
- impasse on an independent, secure and viable Palestine**

INTERNAL CAUSES

- ISLAMIC STATE IDEOLOGY RADIATING OUT FROM SYRIA AND IRAQ COMBATING OR CO-OPTING EXISTING RADICAL GROUPS LIKE AL QAEDA, TALIBAN AND A HOST OF OTHERS
- DIGITAL ISLAM
- WANING OF SECULAR AND TOLERANT ETHOS-CRADLE OF EASTERN RELIGIONS-RUMI AND BALKH
- ENDLESS SECTARIAN STRIFE
- REMOVAL OF AUTHORITARIAN, CORRUPT GOVERNMENTS WITH NOTHING TO REPLACE

- military involvement of regional powers*
- Failure of democracy experiments(Gaza, Iraq)going towards confessional democracy due to entrenched forces*
- Inability to marry war fighting with development in Afghanistan and Iraq*
- Struggle on primacy of Muslim Brotherhood*

EXTERNAL CAUSES

- INCREASED ROLE OF EXTERNAL PLAYERS-
US, IRAN, TURKEY*
- US TROOPS AND BASES IN THE REGION*
- NO 'HONEST BROKER' FOR MIDDLE EAST
PEACE*
- ISRAEL'S ISOLATION YET PRE-EMINENCE*

- growing nuclear ambitions of regional powers–following p5+1 deal with Iran
Saudi Arabia, Egypt*
- no institutional/personal leadership–
AL,
OIC– also taken over by regional
powers
–adversaries become allies*

Economic Causes

– importance of energy resources for war and peace; Great Levant Basin discovery

83000 sq miles; 1.7 billion bbl recoverable oil and a mean of 122 trillion cu.ft of recoverable gas

– no economic dynamism in West Asian economy

– inability to absorb or contribute to the 'knowledge economy'

3.INDIA AND THE REGION

- *Relations sui generis;*
- *Political capital built up by Nehru*
- *Steadfast support to Palestine since Mahatma Gandhi*

– Our experience with Taliban Government in Afghanistan

– Pakistan's malign influence in the region

– Validation of our refrain on cross-border terrorism after 9/11

yet not affected by either– Shi'a–sunni conflict or Al Qaeda ideology

INDIA AND THE REGION

India's relations are a two-way street since 2000 because of

- *Growing close relations with the US*
- *Tension between the West and the region affecting investment*
- *Rising India/Asia in 21st century and our economic success*
- *Likely increase of religion in Kashmir*
- *Terrorism has descended from the valley*

CRISIS POINTS:

**USEFUL TO LOOK AT OUR
POLICY**

**WITH THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN
THE REGION-**

- 1. AFPAK**
- 2. ISRAEL**
- 3. PALESTINE**
- 4. IRAN**
- 5. TURKEY**
- 6. SAUDI ARABIA**

1. AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN

-INDIA COMMITTED TO PROJECTS WORTH US \$2 BILLION: THEIR COMPLETION IN SECURITY

- AFTER US DRAWDOWN IN 2014 PRESIDENT GHANI'S ATTEMPT TO NEGOTIATE WITH TALIBAN YET AGAIN

-US REMAINS BLIND-SIDED ON PAKISTAN;

- RADICALISM FROM AFGHAN GROUPS NURTURED BY PAKISTAN

- ON-GOING PROXY WAR WITH PAKISTAN IN AFGHANISTAN-ATTACK ON OUR EMBASSY AND PROJECTS(USD 1.3 MILLION);

2. ISRAEL

Crux is the 'management of the relationship'

While our support for Palestine remains strong in practice certain changes in nuance

- Driver is defence purchases
- Multifaceted—real estate, I T, medical devices, industrial fabrication
- High penetration in niche sectors of our economy
- Negatives are:
 - Drug inflow
 - Made India a target of religious terror groups—US, Israel, India
 - Effect of Saudi-Israel alliance?

ISRAEL AND NEIGHBOURS



3. PALESTINE

- INDIA HAS ALWAYS SUPPORTED PALESTINE ASPIRATIONS FOR AN INDEPENDENT STATE – GANDHI, NEHRU AND THE REST;

SUPPORT ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

- CLOSE RELATIONS WITH YASSIR ARAFAT

- FIRST TO RECOGNISE THE STATE OF PALESTINE;
OPEN MISSION IN NEW DELHI

- FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO UNRWA

- SUPPORT TWO NATIONS LIVING IN SECURITY

- WHAT IS THE CHANCE?

4. IRAN

IRAN TODAY MAJOR PLAYER IN THE REGION

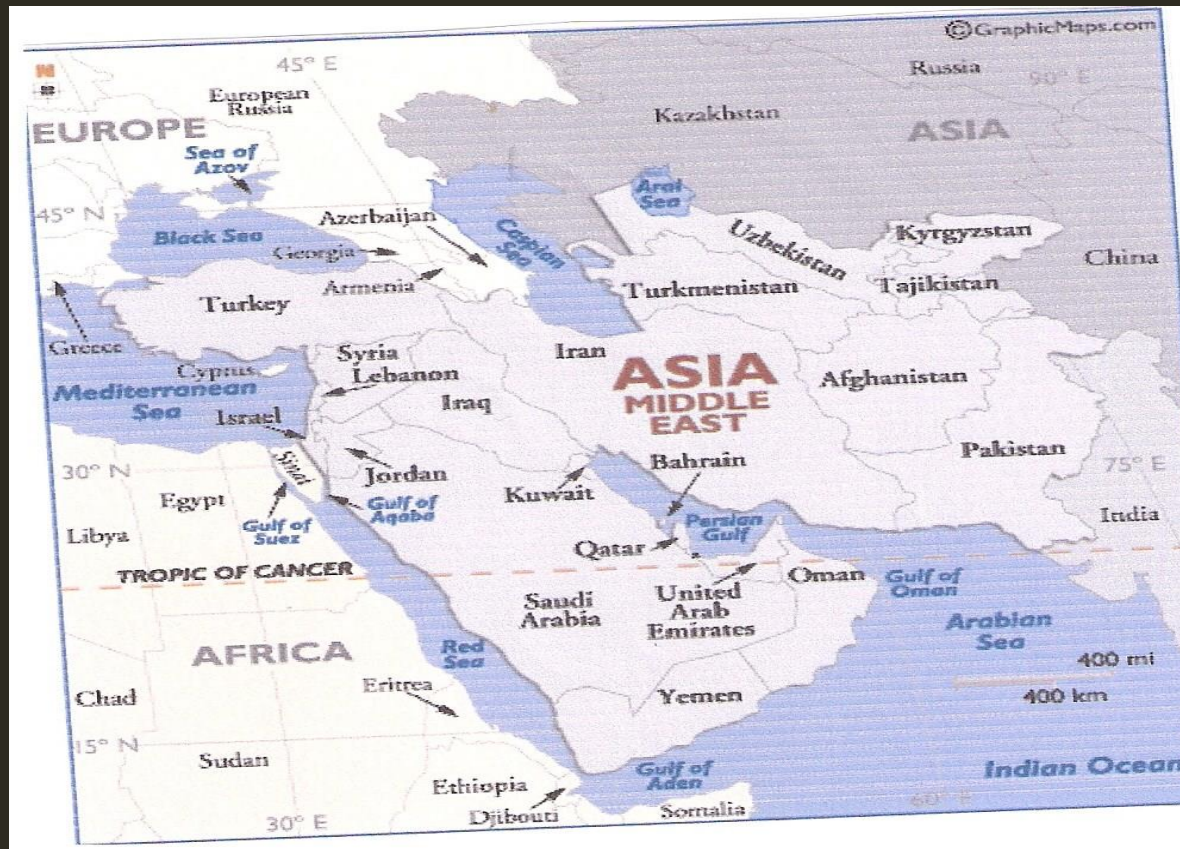
Age-old, resilient countries

Enjoys political consensus

Differences on

- Nuclear agenda and proliferation(Iran is NPT member)
- Relations with Israel
- India follows UN sanctions but opposes US sanctions
- Opposes Iran's nuclear ambitions
- Energy security
- Access to Central Asia
- Trade USD 15 b of which 11 b is oil
- Effect of P5+1–Iran nuclear agreement?

INDIA AND WEST AND CENTRAL ASIA



5. TURKEY

- CHANGE IN KEMALIST PRESCRIPTION OF THE ARMY AS PROTECTOR OF SECULAR CONSTITUTION- AKP GOVERNMENT
- NATO MEMBER-THE ONLY ONE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
- ALWAYS SUPPORTED PAKISTAN ON INDIA-PAKISTAN ISSUE; CHANGE AFTER TERRORISM
- GOOD ECONOMIC AND TRADE RELATIONS
- A PRO-ACTIVE POLICY FORCE IN MIDDLE EAST FOCUSED ON RELIGION AND DOMINANCE

6. SAUDI ARABIA

- WITH INDIA CHANGE FROM RELIGION TO TRADE, INVESTMENT, OIL AND OIL-BASED PROJECTS
- VISIT OF SAUDI KING IN JAN 2006 AND OF PM MANMOHAN SINGH IN MARCH 2010
- CLOSE TO PAKISTAN-
OIL AND FINANCIAL CREDITS, WAHHABISM, TALIBAN, SANCTUARY TO POLITICAL LEADERS, NUCLEAR COOPERATION
- MAJOR ROLE IN CURRENT ME DEVELOPMENTS

LOOKING AHEAD

- centripetal forces have become centrifugal forces
- Will remain crucial as hydrocarbon source, for employment of Indian professionals and remittances
- What is likely to be India's future role? Needs evaluation in terms of the effects of current developments on the region and India.

Will our policy hold?

INDIAN POLICY PARAMETERS

Will have to find a way to deal with whichever governance in place so long as it is not inimical to India and its interests eg. its secular, democratic and plural society

Leverage our growing market and talent pool for the regions natural and financial resources

Reinforce two-way relationship

Manage relations with Israel

POLICY PARAMETERS

- HELP TO SAFEGUARD SECURITY IN THE GULF
- TERROR IN AND OUT FLOWS (EG.AFTAB ANSARI)
- SEA-LANES OF COMMUNICATION