

GS Paper 2

International Relations

India and Extended Neighbourhood

India and West Asia

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West Asia is a part of India's extended neighbourhood.



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Significance of West Asia for India

1)Energy security – 70% of India's imported energy needs come from West Asia.

2)Gateway to Central Asia

3)Strategic Region

- The Persian Gulf is a very important zone for India's maritime security, and the Strait of Hormuz is a strategic point.

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4)Countering Pakistan

3)Trade & Investment – UAE and Saudi Arabia are India's third and fourth-largest trading partners respectively.

4)Economic Growth – India is the largest recipient of foreign remittances from West Asia, which plays a significant role in India's growth.

5)Indian Diaspora – Six West Asian countries (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain) accounted for nearly 70% of all Indians who live abroad. Also there is migration of less skilled labour especially to this area.

6)Culture & Religion – India hosts the ^{2nd}~~3rd~~ largest Muslim population in the world, which views Saudi Arabia as its important pilgrimage.

7)Regional Connectivity – India has invested in Iran's Chabahar port which is expected to a bridge of trade between India, Iran, and Central Asia along with Afghanistan.

8)Defence – India has a strong defence and security partnership with Israel which is useful for its security and military modernization drive.

9)Regional Stability – Close cooperation is essential with west Asian nations to counter radicalization and rising terrorism in the region.

10)Maritime Diplomacy – West Asia is an integral part of India's Indo-Pacific maritime domain.

- Naval cooperation has already been gaining momentum with Oman giving berthing rights to Indian naval vessels to fight piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

Reason for shift in India West Asia relations

1) Gulf countries has multifaceted significance now.

2) Adoption of modern ideas by Gulf countries.

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3) Rise of Khaleeji Capitalism: It is a concept developed by Adam Hanieh. It implies rise of large conglomerates and sovereign wealth funds in the Gulf.

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4)De-hyphenated approach regarding India-Pakistan by Gulf countries.

Political equations in West Asia

I)Iran Saudi Arabia conflict:

Conflict is because of

- Ongoing struggle for regional dominance in the Middle East.

- Religious differences.

Iran is largely Shia Muslim, while Saudi Arabia sees itself as the leading Sunni Muslim power.)

Estimated distribution of Sunni Muslims in the Middle East

5-20% 21-40% 41-60% 61-80% 81%+



Recent dynamics of Iran Saudi Arabia relations:

1)December 2022--- China's President Xi Jinping had a three-day visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

- **Chinese President Xi Jinping and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (Saudi Arabia) signed a “comprehensive strategic partnership agreement”.**
- **President Xi attended the 1st China- Arab States Summit and the China-GCC summit in Riyadh.**

Reason why China has emerged as an important partner in West Asia politics:

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2)10th March 2023---Signing of Peace deal---Saudi Arabia and Iran, represented by their national security advisers, signed an agreement in Beijing, China, to re-establish diplomatic ties, respect each other's sovereignty and maintain non-interference in the other's domestic affairs.

This will enable two giants of the Gulf region to restore diplomatic relations after seven years.

China's Foreign Affairs head, Wang Yi, who brokered the agreement, described it as a **“victory for dialogue, a victory for peace”**. The Saudi Foreign Minister said his country **“favoured political solutions and dialogue”**, while his Iranian counterpart affirmed that his country was pursuing **“the preparation of more regional steps”**. The accord has been welcomed across West Asia.

Significance of this Saudi Arabia- Iran deal for China:

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Countries that can be impacted by the deal:

1) YEMEN: Saudi Arabia entered the conflict in 2015, backing the country's exiled government, while Iran has backed the Houthi rebels who in 2014 seized the capital, Sanaa. The Saudi-Iran deal may provide a boost to efforts to end the conflict.

2) LEBANON: Iran has backed the powerful Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah, while Saudi Arabia has backed the country's Sunni politicians. The deal could see the two push for a political reconciliation in Lebanon.

3) SYRIA: Iran has backed Syria's President Bashar Assad in his country's long war, while Saudi Arabia has backed the rebels seeking to topple him. Again ground for new negotiations are opened now.

4) ISRAEL

5) UNITED STATES

6) Impact on Abraham accord or I2U2

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7) India

The Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said regarding this deal ,
“We have seen the reports in this regard. India has good relations with various countries in West Asia. We have deep abiding interests in that region. India has always advocated dialogue and diplomacy as a way to resolve differences.”

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II) Israel Palestine Issue



Israel's boundaries today



Historical Background: Israel – Palestine conflict

- The conflict has been ongoing for more than a 100 years between Jews and Arabs over a piece of land between Jordan river and the Mediterranean sea.
- **1917**----Ottoman Empire fell after World War 1 and the UK got control over Palestine. The land was inhabited by a Jewish minority and Arab majority.
- **1917**---The Balfour Declaration was issued with the aim of establishing a home for the Jews in Palestine.
- Jews favoured the idea while the Palestinians rejected it. Almost 6 million Jews lost their lives in the Holocaust which also ignited further demand of a separate Jewish state.

- Jews claimed Palestine to be their natural home while the Arabs too did not leave the land and claimed it.
- The International community supported the Jews.
- **1947**---the UN voted for Palestine to be split into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem becoming an international city.
- The plan was accepted by Jewish leaders but rejected by the Arab side and never implemented.

The creation of Israel

- **1948**--Britain lifted its control over the area and Jews declared the creation of Israel.
- Palestinians objected it—led to an armed conflict.
- The neighboring Arabs also invaded and were thrashed by the Israeli troops. This made thousands of Palestinians flee their homes.
- **The persecuted Jews saw Israel as their promised home while Arabs saw it as an occupation.**



Present scenario

- Tensions are often high between Israel and Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank.
- **Jerusalem**--Israel claims the whole of Jerusalem as its capital, while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.
- **Gaza**---Gaza is ruled by a Palestinian militant group called Hamas, which has fought Israel many times.
- **West Bank**---The West Bank was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab -Israeli War. Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since. Most of the West Bank is administered by Israel though 42% of it is under autonomous rule by the Fatah run Palestinian authority.

Israel's boundaries today



Recent Context:

April 2023---Three people were killed in attacks carried out by Palestine in Tel Aviv and the occupied West Bank. Earlier in the day, Israel had launched airstrikes in Lebanon and the Gaza strip targeting Hamas militant sites, days after the attack on Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque.

7th October 2023---Operation Al-Aqsa Flood/Storm---Hamas waged a coordinated surprise attack on Israel. The attack began with a barrage of at least 3,000 rockets launched from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip against Israel. Around 150 Israeli civilians and soldiers were taken as hostages to the Gaza Strip.

Hamas called the operation “Al-Aqsa Storm” and said that it was a response to what it described as Israeli attacks on women, the desecration of the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and the ongoing siege of Gaza.

In response to the attack, **Israel has declared war and launched “Operation Swords of Iron,” striking what it says are Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza.** It has also blocked supply lines of basic necessities to the Gaza population, including fuel and water.

17th October 2023---An explosion at a hospital in Gaza killed at least 500 people.

18th October 2023---US President Joe Biden landed in Israel on a "solidarity" visit.

19th October 2023--- British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak followed US President Joe Biden to demonstrate support to Israel for the war against Hamas.

Reactions worldwide

1) **U.S.** President Joe Biden said the United States “stands with the people of Israel in the face of these terrorist assaults. Israel has the right to defend itself and its people.”

2) **Saudi Arabia**, which has been in talks with the U.S. about normalising relations with Israel, called on both sides to exercise restraint. At the same time, Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry in a statement soon after the attacks did not condemn Hamas. Instead, the ministry noted that it had repeatedly warned that Israel's "occupation, the deprivation of the Palestinian people of their legitimate rights, and the repetition of systematic provocations" led to this moment.

3)**Syria**'s called on countries of the world to stand together to stop “the crimes that Israel is committing against the Palestinian people.”

4)**Egypt** condemned the Israeli army's decision to order the evacuation, which could cause a spike in refugees in Egypt.

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5) **India**---Indian Prime Minister's statement on the Israel-Hamas--“deeply shocked by the news of terrorist attacks in Israel. Our thoughts and prayers are with the innocent victims and their families. **We stand in solidarity with Israel at this difficult hour.**”

- Days after an attack on a hospital in Gaza triggered global outrage, India on October 19 called for strict observance of international humanitarian law.
- On the Palestine issue, India reiterated its position in favour of direct negotiations for a two State solution.
- Indian Prime Minister emphasized that terrorism, in any form and anywhere in the world, goes against the principles of humanity. India stressed for the importance of pursuing peace and brotherhood and moving forward together.

December 12, 2023--- India voted in favour of a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution that called on Israel for an immediate ceasefire, the protection of civilians in accordance with international law and the release of all hostages.

As many as 153 nations, including India, voted in favour of the resolution, while 10, including US, Israel and Austria, voted against and 23 countries, including Argentina, Ukraine and Germany abstained from voting.

Israel expressed that though unsatisfied in general with the decision made in the U.N. Assembly, it appreciate India's votes in favor of the amendments of both U.S. and Austria. At the UNGA the U.S. also proposed an amendment that would insert a specific mention of "heinous terrorist attacks by Hamas that took place in Israel starting 7 October 2023 and the taking of hostages", while Austria proposed an amendment to name Hamas and other groups that are holding Israeli hostages. India voted in favour of them, but both amendments were dropped as they did not receive the votes required.

Earlier India has abstained from the previous UNGA resolution on October 27, 2023, that had called for an immediate. Clarifying on this, India stated that the resolution had not included any “explicit condemnation” of the terror attacks of October 7 or of hostage releases. In the absence of all the elements of our approach not being covered in the final text of the resolution, India abstained in the vote.

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Ques for Practise

Q/-Discuss the effect of Israel Palestine conflict on the Geopolitics of the world.

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Ques/-Analyse the change and continuity in India's relations with Israel and Palestine?

Or

Ques/-Has India's stance to the conflict changed over the years?

UPSC Question

Q/-India's relations with Israel have, of late, acquired a depth and diversity, which cannot be rolled back." Discuss. 2018 (10 marks)

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III) Saudi Arabia and Israel conflict

The two countries have never established diplomatic relations;

1947-- Saudi Arabia voted against the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, which aimed to split the territory of British Palestine into an Arab State and a Jewish State.

Saudi Arabia has not recognised Israel since the latter's independence in 1948 due to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

IV) Israel Iran proxy war

Israel was once ready to supply nuclear missiles to Iran, but its objective in the recent times had changed to stop Iran's nuclear capability.

Early relations between Iran and Israel?

- **1953 coup d'état---reinstalled the pro- western leader Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as the Shah of Iran --relations between the two countries improved.**
- **Israel promised to supply Iran ballistic surface-to-surface missiles.**

Aug 2023---70 YEARS OF COUP IN IRAN---In 1953 US orchestrated coup toppled Iran's prime minister.

- The coup was driven by America's fears about a possible tilt toward the Soviet Union and the loss of Iranian crude oil.
- It is considered to be backed by the country's leading Shiite clergy and brought Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to power

Shift in policy between Iran and Israel

- **1979 revolution**--Brought down the Shah's monarchy in Iran. The revolution forced Shah to flee Iran and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini usher in the theocracy that still governs the country.
- Iran severed all diplomatic and commercial ties with Israel, and
- The theocratic government does not recognize the legitimacy of Israel as a state. It officially recognises Palestine as a state. Ali Khamenei the Supreme Leader of Iran, rejects to state solution.
- The revolution moved Iran from an American ally to its top enemy.
- **Octopus doctrine** : Israel has carried out covert operations inside Iran targeting its nuclear and missile programmes. **Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett termed such operations as the “Octopus doctrine” which means, “Hit the octopus at its head, not just at its tentacles”.**

Iran has also responded with drone attacks, targeting Israeli operatives in northern Iraq.

India's “Look West” Policy

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Domestic Challenges within West Asia

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Important issues/events within West Asia

1)Abraham Accords:

- **Sep 2020--- Israel, UAE and Bahrain signed Abraham Accord brokered by the US.**
- **Significance of the Accord**

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2) I2U2

Context:

Oct 2021----India, UAE, USA and Israel held their first quadrilateral foreign ministers meeting.

July 2022----India, Israel, UAE, and the US held its first virtual summit.

What is I2U2 Initiative?

Background:

- **I2U2 was initially formed in October 2021 following the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE, to deal with issues concerning maritime security, infrastructure and transport in the region.**

Significance of I2U2

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Ques/-What will be the Significance of I2U2 for India?

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UPSC Ques

Q/-How will 12U2 (India, Israel, UAE and USA) grouping transform India's position in global politics? 2022

Ques/-Discuss the challenges associated with I2U2

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3) May 2023---Saudi Arabia hosted a special meeting of the National Security Advisers (NSAs) of India, the U.S. and the UAE.

Meeting represented the shared vision all the four countries for creating a secure and prosperous West Asia.

The partnership aims to “connect South Asia to the Middle East to the United States in ways that promotes economic technology and diplomacy”

Forging together of all these countries is referred as a formation of **Second Quad of West Asia** in the making after the First Quad-I2U2 (India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and United States).

4) July 2023---India's Prime Minister State visit to UAE

Key agreements:

- India and UAE have signed a pact to establish a Local Currency Settlement System (LCSS) framework to promote the use of the Indian Rupee (INR) and UAE Dirham (AED) for cross border transactions.
- Both sides agreed to link India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with UAE's Instant Payment Platform (IPP)
- Both sides agreed to link their respective Card Switches vis-a-vis the RuPay switch and UAESWITCH to enable mutual acceptance of domestic cards and processing of these card transactions.
- Both sides signed an MoU to establish the IIT-Delhi campus in Abu Dhabi, the second IIT abroad after Tanzania.
- UAE is India's 3rd largest trading partner, 2nd largest export destination.
- India is first country to have signed CEPA with UAE.

5) September 2023---India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

- **India's stand:**

Calling it a “**beacon of cooperation and innovation**” that charts a journey of “**shared aspirations and dreams**,” Prime Minister Narendra Modi, joined by US President Biden, and leaders from Saudi Arabia and Europe, unveiled the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, **an ambitious infrastructure project aimed to connect India to Europe via West Asia** at the sidelines of G20 summit in Delhi.

Underlining the “**historic agreement**,” PM Modi said: “**This will be an effective mode of economic integration between India, West Asia, and Europe, in the time to come. This will provide a sustainable direction to connectivity and development in the entire world...India does not measure connectivity in terms of regional borders. India's main priority is to increase connectivity with all regions... We believe that connectivity is the source not only for fostering trade but also trust**”.

India stated, “As history unfolds, may **this corridor be a testament to human endeavour and unity across continents.**”

- **US Stand:**

US remarked, “This is a big deal...a **game changing regional investment...Building sustainable, resilient infrastructure, making quality infrastructure investments, and creating a better future... A future that presents greater opportunity, dignity, and prosperity for everyone.**”

- **EU’s stand:**

European Commission president stated “The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor is nothing but historic. It will be the **most direct connection to date between India, the Arabian Gulf and Europe with a rail link that will make trade between India and Europe 40 per cent faster.**” This will include an electricity cable and a clean hydrogen pipeline to promote clean energy trade between Asia, Middle-East and Europe.

- **Italy’s Stand:**

The launch of the corridor is a **“milestone” in strengthening global interconnections. It will contribute in building bridges between the Mediterranean and Indo Pacific.**

About the Project:

1)The project is part of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)

2)The proposed corridor will consist of Railroad, Ship-to-Rail networks and Road transport routes extending across two corridors, that is,

- The East Corridor – connecting India to the Arabian Gulf,
- The Northern Corridor – connecting the Gulf to Europe.

3)It will also include an electricity cable, a hydrogen pipeline and a high-speed data cable.

4) In addition to India and the US, leaders of the European Union, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Mauritius, and World Bank flagged the corridor widely seen as a strong counter to China's Belt and Road initiative.

INDIA-MIDDLE EAST-EUROPE ECONOMIC CORRIDOR ON MAP



Ques/- IMEC carries a huge geopolitical and economic implications. However, there are some key challenges attached with it. Discuss.

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6) September 2023--- Indian Prime Minister and Saudi Crown Prince cochaired the first summit-level meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council (SPC).

Key Take aways:

- Talks were made to expedite the implementation of the \$50-billion West Coast refinery project. (This would involve the construction of a 60 million-ton refinery cum-petrochemical complex on the Maharashtra coast. It would be a collaborative effort between India, Saudi Arabia, and Abu Dhabi.)
- Discussions regarding possible cooperation in various infrastructure sectors, including the power grid, gas grid, optical grids, and fiber networks.
- MoUs signed in the fields of New and Renewable Energy, Digitization and Electronic manufacturing, enhancing bilateral investment, seawater desalination, etc.

7) October 2023---US under Biden administration is leading diplomatic efforts to support an **Israel–Saudi normalization agreement**.

The reported probable Saudi demands from the United States are:

- A defence treaty approved for ratification by the U.S. Senate with a commitment to defend the kingdom if attacked;
- U.S. help in constructing a civilian nuclear program with some degree of Saudi control over the fuel cycle.
- Enabling the country to enrich fissile material potentially to weapons grade; and access to more U.S. weapons systems.

The primary U.S. quid pro quo (reciprocal demand) from Saudi Arabia's could be an agreement to normalize relations with Israel. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has repeatedly described such an agreement as “transformative.”

Saudi Arabia knows that it will not achieve a NATO like guarantee but wants to achieve instead something akin to US agreements with South Korea and Japan. (the United States has signed an agreement with Japan in 1960, in which the United States is obliged, in the event of an armed attack on Japan, to “act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes.” Article 5 of agreement commits the United States to defend Japan if it is attacked by a third party.)

Ques for Practice

1) Q/-The recent Israel Hamas conflict can have strong effect on the normalisation process between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Comment

OR

Q/-The recent Israel Hamas conflict makes peace elusive in West Asia. Comment

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8) December 2023---Sultan Haitham bin Tarik made his first visit to India since becoming Oman's head of state in 2020 following the death of Sultan Qaboos bin Said. (Sultan Qaboos bin Said is known as the “architect of special ties between India and Oman”. Sultan Qaboos was posthumously honoured with the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2019 by India.)

Key agreements:

- India and Oman are on track to sign a comprehensive economic partnership agreement.
- Agreement between the Financial Intelligence Unit of India and Oman's National Center for Financial Information to prevent money laundering and terror financing.

- India and Oman, Kwatra are partners for maritime security in the western Indian Ocean and both sides have robust defence engagement. Maritime cooperation between the two sides is extensive and Oman's Duqm port can serve as a logistical base for joint efforts for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.
- The two countries revealed an ambitious proposal to recreate a historic maritime voyage, reviving ancient trade routes between India and Oman.
- The two sides affirmed their commitment to enhancing cooperation to combat terrorism and underscored the significance of fostering the universal values of peace, moderation, coexistence and tolerance.
- The two sides have agreed on a vision document titled '*A Joint Partnership For The Future*' that covers several sectors vital for upgrading the relationship. Digital connectivity, medical tourism, maritime security, hospitality, agriculture, and food security are some of the areas that the vision document has focused on.

9) JCPOA Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

Why in News?

October 2022—US imposed sanctions against a Mumbai based petrochemical company, Tibalaji Petrochem Pvt Ltd. As it was accused of selling Iranian petroleum products.

March 2022---The diplomats from Iran and world powers reconvened in Vienna (Austria) to seek a deal reviving Iran's (Tehran's) 2015 Nuclear Accord.

The 2015 Iran nuclear deal was signed under President Barack Obama and dismantled in 2018 by former US President Donald Trump.

What was the 2015 Iran nuclear deal?

- The deal, formally known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- Result of long negotiations (2013 and 2015) between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States + Germany).
- Conditions in the deal:
 - ✓ Iran agreed to cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water (key components for nuclear weapons).
 - ✓ Iran also agreed to allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to access its nuclear sites.
 - ✓ West, in return agreed to lift sanctions related to Iran's nuclear proliferation, however, other sanctions addressing alleged abuses of human rights and Iran's ballistic missile programme remained intact.

- Israel (America's closest ally in the Middle East)---strongly rejected the deal.
- Saudi Arabia (Iran's great regional rival)--- complained that they were not involved in the negotiations.
- 2018--US under Former President Trump abandoned the deal and reinstated banking and oil sanctions in 2018.
- Subsequently Iran ramped up its nuclear programme. (returning to approximately 97% of its pre-2015 nuclear capabilities.)

What happened after the US pulled out of the deal?

- April 2020--US announced its intention to snap back sanctions. However, the other partners objected to the move.
- Even after the withdrawal, several countries continued to import Iranian oil under waivers granted by the Trump administration.
- A year later, the US ended the waivers thus limiting Iran's oil exports.
- Launch of INSTEX (by other actors)---a barter system to facilitate transactions with Iran outside the US banking system. However, INSTEX only covered food and medicine, which were already exempted from US sanctions.
- January 2020---US assassinated the top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani--Iran announced that it would no longer limit its uranium enrichment.
- November 2020, a law was passed in Iran's Parliament that significantly boosted the enrichment of Uranium. Later in 2021, Iran refused the IAEA inspection.

What are the Challenges to the Restoration of JCPOA?

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What is the Significance of JCPOA for India?

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UPSC Question

**Q/-In what ways would the ongoing US-Iran Nuclear Pact Controversy affect the national interest of India? How should India respond to its situation?
2018(15)**

Key Challenges in Indo West Asia relations

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Way Forward

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