



## India's Vishwamitra odyssey: Navigating energy, defence and diplomacy with Israel and Iran amidst contemporary challenges

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### Abstract

India's foreign policy toward Israel and Iran has evolved significantly over the last few decades, reflecting both its strategic interests and the complex geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East. As Israel and Iran remain embroiled in deep-rooted tensions, India faces the challenge of balancing its relations with both nations, whose contrasting stances on regional security, trade, and diplomacy influence India's national interests. This imbalance the universal peace and global good. India's vision as Vishwamitra the "friend to the world" reflects its unique ability to transcend geopolitical divides and foster partnerships with nations that often stand in opposition to each other. In the modern context, Israel and Iran present a diplomatic tightrope for India. Israel is a key partner for defence, technology, and innovation, while Iran is critical for energy security and regional connectivity. However, contemporary challenges including US sanctions, China's increasing impact in Iran, the Abraham Accords and India's domestic energy transition are reshaping these relationships. This paper analyses India's evolving role as a mediator and pragmatist while staying committed to its strategic autonomy in a multipolar world.

**Keywords:** Vishwamitra odyssey, defence, energy, Israel and Iran

### Introduction

"Don't think it is necessary for India to join any axis. India is entitled to make its own choices which will be balanced of its values and interest", these words from India's External affair minister, S. Jaishanker clearly deflects the triumph of India's diplomacy. The term Vishwamitra encapsulates India's desires to be a responsible international power embodying ancient philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. In modern geopolitics, India aspires to play the role of a stabilizing force amidst conflicts and rivalries. India's foreign policy between Israel and Iran has traditionally been defined by a pragmatic balance of competing interests. Historically India maintained cordial relations with Iran, grounded in mutual interests in trade, energy and regional security. Meanwhile India's ties with Israel which once largely focused on defence and security cooperation, has expanded to encompass a wide range of strategic, economic and technological sectors. The current Israel-Iran tensions have posed significant challenges for India, however India strives to maintain its strategic ties with both countries. As India embarks on this delicate balancing act one can recall the profound wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita, where Lord Krishna imparts the concept of balance and detachment in action:

"योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि संगं त्यक्त्वा धनंजय । सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समो भूत्वासमत्वं योग उच्यते ॥"

(Bhagavad Gita 2.48)

This verse resonates with India's strategic approach navigating its relations with Israel and Iran without being swayed by external pressures and ensuring stability through a balanced foreign policy.

### India-Israel Relations: Defence, Innovation and Abraham Accord

India-Israel relationship has been one of the most sensitive and controversial issues in the history of New Delhi diplomacy. India approved newly formed Israel state in September 1950, but established its diplomatic relations in 1992. Nicolas Blarel has mentioned that India-Israel defence ties have grown rapidly since the 1990s particularly in 1999 at the time, when Israel provided critical military supports despite US sanctions in his book, 'The Evolution of India's Israel policy'. Israel is one of India's most important defence partners, providing advanced military technology including missile defence system and surveillance equipments.

India also import largest chunk of arms from Israel, contributing for 14% of overall arms imports in 2023 (SIPRI). India and Israel has jointly developed Barak-8, a surface to air missile system. It is intended for protection against variety of airborne threats including aircraft, anti-ship missiles, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), ballistic missiles and combat planes. Heron drones are used for monitoring precise strikes.

Israel helps India's Atmanirbhar Bharat with technological transfers and co-development, particularly in artificial intelligence and quantum technologies. By developing these collaborations Israel and India may position themselves as worldwide leaders in innovations. Both the countries also strengthening government to government and people to people ties.

Israel's expertise in agriculture, water management and technology aligns with India's domestic needs like Projects including India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund that promotes cooperation in high technologies areas. Israel's drip irrigation technologies are revolutionizing Indian agriculture contributing to agritech diplomacy.

The historic breakthrough moment began in 2020 with the Abraham Accords (facilitated by the USA) that normalized the relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan. This deal not only changed Middle Eastern geopolitics, but it also created huge strategic opportunities for India. The Accords promoted greater economic cooperation, regional stability and opportunities for India to strengthen its position in West Asia.

The Accords opened up new opportunities for India to form trilateral alliances. The India-UAE-Israel corridor has grown as an important economic structure, particularly in technology, agriculture and trade. In 2022, India's trade with Israel reached \$10 billion, with a rising emphasis on defense technology, while the UAE stands as the third-largest trading partner of India with bilateral trade of \$84.5 billion in FY 2022-23. Furthermore, the Accords emphasize digital innovation and renewable energy, which aligns with India's objectives, creating prospects for partnership in solar power and artificial intelligence.

Strategically, the Accords have reduced tensions between India's traditional allies in the Gulf and Israel, allowing New Delhi to balance its ties. India's expatriate workforce of 9 million in the Gulf and annual remittances of \$45 billion stand to benefit from the region's enhanced stability. Overall, the Abraham Accords amplify India's ability to act as a bridge in the evolving West Asian landscape. India's ability to maintain balance amid shifting alliances demonstrates its commitment to strategic prudence.

### **Contemporary Geopolitical Challenges for India Energy Security in the Age of Sanctions**

India has historically relied on Iran for its energy needs due to proximity, favorable pricing and trade terms. In recent years, however, India has faced growing pressure from the United States and other Western countries to reduce its dependence on Iranian oil due to international sanctions on Tehran, which resulted in a decline of India's annual trade with Iran which plummeted from \$17 billion in 2018 to \$4 billion by 2020 (EXIM Bank Data).

Escalation of tensions between Israel and Iran could result in the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran, which will further complicate India's energy security as disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz would impact on India's oil imports, as 21% of imports of oil and LPG transport from this strait.

### **Chabahar Port and Regional Connectivity: Importance for India**

Chabahar Port, situated in southeastern Iran, is of great strategic importance for India's goals in regional connectivity and geopolitics. The port acts as a crucial point for India to access Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond and improves trade routes to the landlocked countries of Central Asia and supports India's "Connect Central Asia" initiative. It is consistent with India's larger goal of enhancing connectivity via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Additionally, the port reinforces India's economic and diplomatic relations with Iran, promoting shared development despite the challenges posed by U.S. sanctions.

In the context of the "India's Vishwamitra Odyssey", which explores India's multifaceted global outreach, Chabahar Port symbolizes India's commitment to balancing regional dynamics. It reflects India's ability to engage with diverse

partners, including Iran and Israel, often perceived as adversaries by adopting a pragmatic foreign policy. While India's relationship with Israel thrives on defence and technology cooperation, its engagement with Iran pivots around energy security and connectivity, showcasing India's diplomatic agility. The strategic interplay at Chabahar enables India to resist China's influence in the region and its investments in projects including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port.

Furthermore, Chabahar Port offers India a platform to engage in cooperative regional frameworks that promote economic stability and counter terrorism, especially in Afghanistan post-U.S. withdrawal. This trilateral connectivity initiative among India, Iran and Afghanistan not only facilitates trade but also strengthens India's position as a regional power with a global outlook. Integrating Chabahar into India's diplomatic narrative with Israel underscores India's ability to harmonize conflicting interests while pursuing regional stability and strategic autonomy in an evolving geopolitical landscape.

Despite US sanctions on Tehran, India continues investing in Chabahar, reaffirming its strategic autonomy. Chabahar's integration into INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor) uplifts trade routes connecting India to Russia and Europe.

### **Rising Chinese Influence in Iran**

China's 25-year Strategic Partnership Agreement (2021) with Iran worth \$400 billion, poses a significant challenge to India's regional influence. It creates strategic risks as China's deep investments in Iran's energy and infrastructure sectors threaten to overshadow India's presence. However, due to US-Iran tensions, India faces pressure from the US to isolate Iran economically. Yet India's non-alignment policy allows it to pursue its interests. The US granted India an exemption for Chabahar investments, reflecting India's strategic importance and thus allowing India to use it as a balancing act against Chinese influence in the Middle East.

### **The Role of IMEC in India's Vishwamitra Odyssey**

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) represents a transformative initiative in India's strategic journey of global influence, aptly encapsulated in the "India Vishwamitra Odyssey". IMEC aims to enhance connectivity across India, the Middle East and Europe, creating an extensive trade and transportation network. This corridor is envisioned to bridge economies, facilitate seamless trade and strengthen energy security, aligning with India's aspirations to assert itself as a global leader in sustainable development and multipolar diplomacy.

IMEC's significance lies in its potential to integrate India's ambitions with global economic systems, fostering partnerships with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel and European nations. It neutralizes China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), reinforcing India's role as a proponent of transparent and inclusive infrastructure projects. The corridor aligns with India's maritime vision under the Sagarmala Project, providing an alternative trade route that reduces dependency on volatile chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz.

In the context of the Vishwamitra Odyssey, which symbolizes India's pursuit of global harmony and strategic engagement, IMEC embodies India's commitment to creating interconnected and cooperative frameworks. It also

underscores India's balancing act in managing relationships with divergent partners, including the U.S., Iran and Israel while advancing its strategic interests. IMEC strengthens India's influence in West Asia, reinforcing its role as a link between the East and the West and elevates India's standing as a key player in shaping the future of global trade and connectivity.

By fostering economic integration and cross-cultural collaboration, IMEC aligns with the broader ethos of "वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्।" a world rooted in shared prosperity and strategic resilience.

### India's Domestic Energy Transition

India's domestic energy transition is central to its Vishwamitra Vision, symbolizing a journey toward sustainable growth, global collaboration and strategic autonomy. As the nation shifts from fossil fuels to renewable and low-carbon energy systems, its energy strategy emphasizes diversification, security and innovation. Both Iran and Israel play pivotal roles in India's energy matrix, reflecting a pragmatic foreign policy that leverages opportunities for economic and technological partnerships despite geopolitical complexities.

Iran, with its vast oil and natural gas reserves, is a critical player in ensuring India's energy security. The strategic Chabahar Port provides India direct entry to Central Asia, enabling energy trade while bypassing regional chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz. Furthermore, Iran's potential inclusion in India's International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) underscores its importance in India's connectivity and energy diversification strategies. This collaboration aligns with India's goal of reducing its dependence on energy imports from politically volatile regions.

Israel contributes to this shift by sharing technological expertise in renewable energy and water management. Its advances in solar energy, hydrogen technology and smart grids equip India with creative alternatives to help it achieve its green energy targets. Collaborative projects like collaborative research and development not only strengthen India's internal capabilities but also dovetail with the country's objective of becoming a global leader in clean energy production and exports.

The Vishwamitra Vision, which reflects India's ethos of universal harmony and strategic engagement, harmonizes these partnerships. It balances India's ties with Iran, a traditional energy partner, and Israel, a technological ally, showcasing India's diplomatic agility. By fostering cooperation with both nations, India not only secures its energy future but also strengthens its geopolitical footprint, contributing to regional stability and global sustainability.

India's energy transition, supported by strategic collaborations with Iran and Israel, thus becomes a cornerstone of its Vishwamitra Vision—a vision rooted in shared prosperity, sustainable development, and the pursuit of global harmony.

### India's Vishwamitra Vision in a Multipolar World Amidst the Israel-Iran Conflict

India's Vishwamitra Vision expresses its desire to navigate a complicated multipolar world through diplomacy, strategic autonomy and inclusive growth. The current crisis between

Israel and Iran provides both obstacles and opportunities for India to underline its role as a regional balancer and global mediator. India's approach is based on energy diplomacy with Iran serving as a key partner for crude oil and natural gas and Israel providing cutting-edge renewable energy technologies. While maintaining strong relations with Iran particularly through the Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), India is leveraging its defence modernization efforts with Israel, which provides advanced weaponry and cyber-protection technologies. The phrase "समन्वयः सर्वकार्याणां साधकः।" represents India's ability to deal with both foes, demonstrating its commitment to strategic pragmatism.

India's regional balancing act in the Middle East highlights its diplomatic agility, while supporting peaceful coexistence, India avoids entanglement in sectarian or geopolitical rivalries, emphasizing economic and energy interdependence as stabilizing factors. This approach aligns with its broader goal of ensuring energy security, advancing technological progress and fostering stability in volatile regions.

Through its Vishwamitra Vision, "शान्तिर्हि परमं लक्ष्यं।" India aspires to mediate conflict, enhance regional connectivity and advocate for multilateral frameworks that transcend divisions. By engaging Israel and Iran within a framework of mutual benefit, India reinforces its position as a bridge between East and West, emphasizing shared prosperity and sustainable development in a fragmented world. India's pursuit of strategic autonomy and regional stability aligns with its dharma as a responsible global actor.

### Conclusion

India's Vishwamitra Odyssey encapsulates its strategic journey of navigating the intertwined realms of energy, defence and diplomacy amidst the complexities of the Israel-Iran rivalry and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Rooted in the principles of universal harmony and pragmatic multilateralism, India leverages its unique position to promote global good, mediate conflicts and advocate for stability. By balancing its energy ties with Iran, defence cooperation with Israel and diplomatic neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, India demonstrates its ability to engage with diverse stakeholders without compromising its strategic autonomy.

India is a rising force in a multipolar world, its commitment to advancing inclusive development and peace is demonstrated by its participation in programs like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), its strong participation in multilateral organization's like the G20 and BRICS. India's strategic objectives in the Middle East are designed to counter growing influence of China in the region by fortifying its alliances based on respect for sovereignty of each nation, economic progress and openness.

By promoting peace, sustainability, and equitable development, India positions itself on as a key driver of global stability, offering solutions that transcend traditional power dynamics while addressing shared challenges of energy security, technological innovation, and geopolitical conflict. Through this vision India not only safeguards its national interests but also contributes to a harmonious and interconnected world promoting global good.

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