

International Relations This Week: Episode 78

International relations is a very important segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#). In this series, we present an analysis of the most important international issues and developments that occurred over the past week relevant for the IAS exam. In this article, you can learn more about the latest developments on Iran, Israel and the Japan Sea.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/G7t8bfHvx0A>

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1. Developments associated with Iran

Context:

Now the time is going to come for the abolishment of the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action \(JCPOA\)](#) - an agreement signed between P5+1 (USA, UK, France, China, Russia, and Germany) and Iran regarding limiting Iran's sensitive nuclear activities and enabling international inspectors to inspect Iranian nuclear establishments in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions on Iran. After this, the geopolitical situation of the Middle East is expected to see dramatic changes. In this context, we will discuss new geopolitical equations in the Middle East and India's potential stance.

Iran's Significance for India:

- Iran is an old civilization that has had historical connections with India during its Zoroastrian era as well as during the Islamic era.
- On the other hand, Iran has the potential to play an important role in India's energy security through its reserves of petroleum and natural gas.
- Iran is also significant for peace establishment and socio-economic development in Afghanistan.
- Despite hostile relations with the USA and its allies in the Middle East (Israel and the Sunni block countries), Iran has a strong influence in different geopolitical hot spots of this region e.g. Syria, Libya, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq. In simple words, Iran has the potential to establish peace in the Middle East region, fight global terrorism, and piracy in the Arabian Sea, and hence India as a target of global terror groups will be a beneficiary of such a role of Iran.

Issues between US and Iran:

- Historically, US-Iran hostile relations started after the [Islamic Revolution](#) of Iran in 1973. The USA and Iran had friendly relations under the Iranian monarchy. After the fall of this monarchy due to the Islamic revolution, the relations between USA and Iran became hostile under the new Iranian Islamic government. The problem got more complicated when Iran started a nuclear program and started threatening Israel.
- In 2015, after intensive diplomatic activity, Iran agreed on a long-term deal on its nuclear program - the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia, and Germany.
- Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.
- But, the USA under President Donald Trump abolished JCPOA and imposed economic sanctions on Iran. The US argued that Iran has not abided by the conditions of the agreement and is supporting terror activities in Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. The USA also argued that Iran violated the conditions of the accord by lifting the surveillance cameras of the [IAEA](#).
- In a counterargument, Iran said that it did not violate any condition of the accord as 70 percent of its nuclear establishments are under the surveillance of international bodies. The UK, France, China, Russia, and Germany supported Iran on this point and did not support US economic sanctions on Iran.
- On the other hand, the killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in Iraq by US forces, the killing of Iranian nuclear scientists and a military colonel by Israel, and the alleged cyber-attack on the Iranian uranium enrichment facility made the situation more complicated.
- Now after signing the [Abraham Accords](#), a new equation of peace and cooperation was established between the Saudi-led Sunni bloc and Israel. This new alliance in the Middle East is traditionally against Iran.

Iranian Look East Stance:

Iran is now diversifying its international relations by increasing its cooperation with the east, especially with Central Asia, Russia, and China to bypass US economic sanctions. The following are some important points in this regard:

- US rivalry with Russia, China, and Iran put these countries on the same forum, and thus these three countries are increasing cooperation on economic as well as geopolitical fronts to counter the USA and its allies.
- **Role in Afghanistan:**
 - Iran is playing a significant role to establish political stability in Afghanistan even with the new [Taliban](#) regime. It is helping the Taliban to fight the global terror group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq, Syria, and Khorasan).
 - Iran is providing sea access to Afghanistan via its [Chabahar port](#). India helped Iran to develop the Chabahar port and Zaranj-Delaram road connecting Iran and Afghanistan.
- **Role in Central Asia:**

- Iran is cooperating with Central Asian countries to give them access to the sea via its Chabahar and Bandar Abbas ports.
- Iran is emerging as a military supplier for central Asian countries as it is in the process of setting up a factory of Ababeel-2 military drones.
- **Iran's relations with India:**
 - India-Iran economic relations gained heights during the development of the Chabahar port in Iran. India also has been a major importer of Iranian oil despite US economic sanctions.
 - Both countries are also cooperating on humanitarian aid works in Afghanistan.
 - But recently, Iran raised objections over the insulting comments on Prophet Mohammad by an Indian politician. This episode put some bitterness in India-Iran relations.

Conclusion: There is a need to make the Ministry of External Affairs more prepared for damage control in matters affecting India's international standing.

2. Developments associated with Israel

Context: Recently, the Israeli government under Prime Minister Naftali Bennett lost in parliament over a vote on the New Sattler's law. This event is expected to create political instability in Israel.

The following two issues are leading to instability in Israel:

- **Large Scale Political Corruption:** The Israeli government under Benjamin Netanyahu faced allegations of large-scale corruption in court and lost. But the defeat of the government of Prime Minister Bennett in parliament can push Israel again into an era of political corruption.
- **Jerusalem Issue:** After shifting the US embassy to Jerusalem, the Israeli government started settling more Jewish people in Jerusalem and stopped prayers in the Al-Aqsa mosque. This led to clashes between the Muslim community and Israeli forces and attracted international outrage over Israel's human rights violations. This can also increase terror activities in the region as most terror groups lure Muslim youth in the name of Israeli atrocities on Palestinian Muslims. Even the Israeli Jewish community is also divided over this issue, many moderate Jewish people are tired of this long struggle and talk about the human rights of Palestinians.

Importance of Israel for India:

- Israel is an emerging major defense equipment supplier as well as a provider of intelligence to India helping to protect India's border from two adversaries China and Pakistan and to fight terrorism.

- India and Israel are also cooperating over research and development in different fields e.g. medicine, space technology, information technology, etc.

Way Forward:

In the light of the above developments in Iran and Israel, the Indian government needs to balance its foreign relations to ensure the protection of its national interests. Here we can consider the following points for India:

- India should follow a sovereign policy towards Iran and can increase oil trade with Iran, but India should also win the trust of the USA and gain exemptions from USA's CAATSA Act ([Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act](#)).
- In the light of Prophet Mohammad's insult controversy, the Indian government must ensure that India's domestic politics does not affect its foreign relations.
- [India-Israel relations](#) are going in positive directions, but the Indian government should not stand by Israel's acts against human rights.

Conclusion: There is a need to make the Ministry of External Affairs more prepared for damage control in matters affecting India's international standing.

3. Developments Associated with the Japan Sea

Context: Recently, a diplomatic conflict arose between Japan and Russia in the Japan Sea.

Recent Issues between Japan and Russia:

- The recent attack of Russia on Ukraine and the USA's failure to provide security to Ukraine led to a feeling of insecurity in Japan due to the Russian and Chinese hostile stance against Japan. In this anxiety, Japan invited [NATO](#) countries to conduct a naval exercise in the Japan Sea. Additionally, Japan strongly criticized the Russian attack on Ukraine and supported economic sanctions on Russia. Such a Japanese stance triggered anger in Russia.
- In return, Russia withdrew fishing rights given in 1998 to Japan over the Kuril Islands by alleging that Japan has not paid any royalty on fishing. On the other hand, Japan claimed that the Kuril Islands belonged to Japan and were forcefully occupied by Russia during the end of the [second world war](#). So Japan need not pay any royalty for fishing here.

Other Threats to Peace in the Pacific Region:

- China's disputes with Japan and other Southeast nations over various Islands.

- North Korea's nuclear threat to South Korea and Japan. Recently, North Korea conducted its 7th nuclear test to threaten the USA, Japan, and South Korea.

India's Stance over Conflict in the Pacific Region:

- India is considered a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region, and is developing strategic partnerships via [QUAD](#) (India, Japan, Australia, and the USA Quadrilateral partnership) and AUKUS (Australia, the UK, and the US partnership) in the Pacific region.
 - India has deep cooperation over vaccine diplomacy, cultural exchanges, technology development, disaster management, global warming, and climate change with countries of the Pacific region.
 - India needs to play a balanced and positive role in the case of conflict between Russia and Japan.
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