

4. China's West Asia policy and Implications for India

Prelims Syllabus: International Relations

Mains Syllabus: GS-II International Relations | India & Its Neighborhood - Relations



Why in News?

- China's increasing involvement in global power dynamics has been propelled by its diplomatic work in West Asia, which has been facilitated by regional states leveraging its influence with Iran.
- China's role as peacemaker in the region has given it a significant advantage in global power tussles, especially in the wake of the Saudi Arabia-Iran diplomatic thaw.
- However, the implications of China's role in global power dynamics are far-reaching.

China's Diplomatic Influence in the Region

- **Saudi Arabia-Iran diplomatic thaw:** The diplomatic thaw between Saudi Arabia and Iran has propelled China further into global power tussles. Saudi Arabia and Iran have been in a long-standing rivalry, which has caused instability in the region. However, the recent diplomatic thaw has provided an opportunity for China to expand its influence in the region.
- **China's role as peacemaker in West Asia:** China's role as peacemaker in West Asia has given it a significant advantage in global power tussles. Beijing has leveraged its influence with Iran to broker peace deals in the region. China's diplomatic efforts have been largely successful, and it has emerged as a key player in global power dynamics.

- **Implications of China's role in global power dynamics:** China's diplomatic efforts have put it in a unique position to shape the global order, especially as the United States' influence wanes.
China's growing influence has also raised concerns among other major powers, who fear that China's ambitions may threaten their interests.

India's Political and Diplomatic Outreach in West Asia

- **Cultural and geographical proximity:** India's outreach in West Asia has been extensive, with a deep cultural history and geographic proximity to the region.
- **Diplomacy and dialogue:** India has not commented on the Saudi Arabia-Iran thaw but has always stood for diplomacy and dialogue.
- **India's official position "No third-party mediation":** Many in West Asia believe that India is in a good position to act as a mediator in the region's conflicts, but India has balked at such an idea due to its official position of not supporting third-party mediation on Kashmir with Pakistan.

India's Relations with Iran

- India's relations with Iran have been impacted by sanctions and difficulties in fastening or upscaling developmental activities at Chabahar Port.
- India's economic relations with Iran have suffered due to sanctions and India's efforts to build closer ties with the US by promoting talks with Iran over the latter's nuclear program.
- Strategic interests in Iran for India remain palpable, especially in light of the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan and Russia's war against Ukraine.

China's influence and impact on India's relations in the region

- **China's capacity to influence Iran:** China's growing economic and political influence in Iran could potentially give it leverage over Iran's foreign policy decisions, especially with regard to its relations with India. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also been a major factor in shaping China's relations with Iran, and India's decision not to join the initiative has limited its economic ties with Iran.
- **Russia and middle east:** China's increasing collaboration with Russia in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, is also a cause of concern for India. Russia's closer military cooperation with Iran, coupled with its drifting towards China, could potentially create a power bloc in the region that may not be aligned with India's interests.

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- **Peacemaker in West Asia:** China's efforts in brokering a diplomatic thaw between the two countries could potentially lead to a reduction in tensions in the region. While this could be seen as a positive development, it could also impact India's interests in the region, particularly given its close ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

New Delhi's need to readjust its positions in the region

- India's historic ties with Iran and its strategic interests in the region make it imperative for India to maintain strong ties with Iran.
- India will also need to balance its relations with other regional players, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which have been key partners in India's energy security and economic growth.
- India may also need to explore new avenues for economic engagement with Iran, given the limitations posed by sanctions and China's growing presence in the region.

Conclusion:

- China's role as peacemaker in West Asia still needs to play out, but its influence on the region and global politics has implications for India's relations with Iran. Given China's growing influence in West Asia, India will need to reassess its position in the region and adjust its foreign policy accordingly.

