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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

W H I T E B L A C K
L E G A L

INDIA'S NUANCED DIPLOMATIC BALANCING ACT- A STUDY IN CONTEXT OF ISRAEL-IRAN AXIS OF CONFLICT

AUTHORED BY - SANIGHDHA

ABSTRACT

India has always been the centre of attraction of the rest of the world. This is because of the fact that India has always contributed to the well-being and benefit of all humanity. The emphasis on dialogue and diplomacy have been our forte, having avoided any kind of direct conflict between herself and any other nation, and also any other two nations. This is pertinent to note in today's context because of the growing conflict in the middle eastern and the west Asian regions. It seems like half the world is at war with each other because of many players having their cherished stake in the ongoing conflicts. But what comes as most surprising is the Israel - Iran conflict, that nobody wanted or wanted to have. The incessant war that was going on between Israel and Hamas was already too much to deal with. But the Indian stand on the issue is proudly laudable and hence makes a clear distinction from her old diplomatic tactics which fell short of dehyphenating relations in the international arena. The present research deals with the genesis of the conflict between Israel and Iran, along with the already brewing status of discord, India's balanced approach on the issue and the future prospects that are available to India as a rising super power.

KEYWORDS

Middle East; Diplomacy; International relationship; War; Israel-Iran

I. INTRODUCTION

India has always been proud to host the world's oldest and the most advanced civilisation, i.e. the Indus Valley Civilisation, which was present during the time period of 2500-1500 B.C. (before Christ). The civilisation was so developed and extensively grown, both economically and socio-politically, that the wealth of the people residing is difficult to put to paper. The presence of architectural structures like the Great Bath, the granaries, the double-storied houses, and prevalence of separate rooms for different purposes; is just the tip of the iceberg in praise of that period. On the one hand, the civilisation grew internally beyond leaps and bounds, but on the other, it grew so much externally that other civilisations actually took ideas and cues from the Indus Valley Civilisations¹ and incorporated the same in their areas. The prevalence of trade and commerce between the civilisation and others such as the Mesopotamian and the Babylonian civilisations is evident from the records that have been excavated and discovered. Meaning thereby, the 'external affairs' of the Indian subcontinent were richly developed and inter-linked with modern day Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This, in short clarifies and establishes the fact that the diplomatic Middle Eastern nations have always been inevitable and indispensable for the growth of Indian economy and have been a source of handsome development in all spheres of Indian life.

The region, known as West Asia by the NATO powers is strategically immensely important for India. The import of rubies, jewels, oil, and natural gas as well as their market substitutes is something that the region actively supplies, making India dependent on itself for the same. Recent news items have pointed out to a brewing conflict in the region, initially between Israel and Gaza, and now also, between Israel and Iran, after Israeli missile wrongfully (as reported) bombed the Iranian embassy killing two high-ranking officials of Iranian Revolutionary Guard outfit. This is seen as a direct challenge to the Supreme leader of Iran and the Head of the servants of Astan Quds Razavi, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It has also infuriated the Lebanon-bred Iranian insurgency group- the Hezbollah, which has vowed to attack Israelis like never before. Tension has been brewing in the region due to different allegiances, proxy wars, Shia-

¹ WORLD HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA, (May 25, 2024, 8:30 PM), available at https://www.worldhistory.org/Indus_Valley_Civilization/; JOHN MARSHALL, MOHENJO DARO AND THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION (2020); GREGORY L. POSEHLL, THE INDUS CIVILISATION (2002); ANDREW ROBINSON, THE INDUS: LOST CIVILISATIONS (2015); DAVID GILMOUR, THE BRITISH IN INDIA: THREE CENTURIES OF AMBITION AND EXPERIENCE (2019); DENNIS KINCAID, THE BRITISH SOCIAL LIFE IN INDIA (2015); PRAN NEVILE, THE SAHIB' S INDIA: VIGNETTES FROM THE RAJ (2010).

Sunni-jew belligerencies to gain supremacy over the natural resources, tinkering with the peace in the Gaza Strip after the Hamas attack and the recent news items claiming that Israel is going to attack Iran, for the future times, if Iran does not apologise or clear the Israeli way. Allowing this situation to glide over to a turbulent conflict does not help India in any way, which is already balancing the squared situation in a very nuanced manner, for its own benefit- also handling it with the Russian-Ukrainian² conflict as well as the changing situations there. Thus, the situation calls for a well-thought-out approach which not only balances the whole situation, but also helps in advancing Indian interests in the region that has always been on the boiling pot, since the discovery of oil and other natural gas resources and the ensuing conflicts over the supremacy of the same. The current External Affairs Minister of India, Dr. S. Jaishankar has already put out India's stand very clearly in front of everyone and has been appreciated for his tough stance wherever the benefit of India's territory and multi-pronged interests are involved.

II. THE EVOLUTION AND GROWTH OF ISRAELI-IRANIAN STATE AND INTER-STATE RIVALRY

Geopolitically, Israel is a Jew-majority and Hebrew speaking region (modern-day Nation-State) located in the Southern Levant area of West Asia. Here, it must be understood that the nomenclature of the areas and regions is decided and put forward from the viewpoint of the Western nations such as the United States of America and the European nations; which is why the Middle East and West Asia are roughly the names given to the same regions, with a sliver of exclusions of inclusions here and there, depending upon who is giving the definition and in which context is the area being talked about. The Levantine or Levant³ is an estimated and imprecise term which is used to refer to a large area in the Eastern Mediterranean Region of West Asia and fundamental territory of politico-diplomatic term Middle East. Today, this region comprises of Israel, Palestine, Jordan and at some places is said to include Southern Lebanon,

² COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, (May 25, 2024, 8:30 PM), available at <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>; BBC, (May 25, 2024, 8:30 PM), available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60506682>; AL JAZEERA, (May 25, 2024, 8:30 PM), available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/ukraine-russia-crisis/>; BRITANNICA (May 25, 2024, 8:30 PM), available at <https://www.britannica.com/event/2022-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine>; INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY, (May 25, 2024, 8:30 PM), available at <https://www.iea.org/topics/russias-war-on-ukraine>;

³ PETERS MANSFIELD, THE HISTORY OF MIDDLE EAST (2009); GORDON KERR, SHORT HISTORY OF MIDDLE EAST: FROM ANCIENT EMPIRES TO ISLAMIC STATE (2016); EDWARD SAID, ORIENTALISM (2016); WILLIAM L. CLEVELAND, HISTORY OF MODERN MIDDLE EAST (2008); ALBERT HOURANI, HISTORY OF MODERN ARAB PEOPLE (1991); DANIEL GORDIS, ISRAEL: A CONCISE HISTORY (2016); WALTER LAQUEUR, A HISTORY OF ZIONISM (1978); SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE, JERUSALEM- THE BIOGRAPHY (2011).

Southern Syria, and Sinai Peninsula. It is inevitable to understand the construction of this particular region because the whole conflict lies here only, and now, with the rising retaliation claims by the Israeli forces, it is imperative enough to understand the historical apparatus as well as the importance of the region. Israel, specifically shares its borders with Lebanon, Syria, Jordan to the north, northeast and east respectively, with Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the south and the west, along with sharing the borders with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (where the fight is still going on- and these two are widely claimed and disputed as Palestinian territories) to the east and the southwest, respectively. The Israeli- proclaimed territory of the whole of Jerusalem⁴ is the capital city, with the diplomatic circles and political coteries recognising only East Jerusalem as the capital of the aforesaid. The above-mentioned geographical position of Israel is clearly a pointer towards the sadly sandwiched position of the country between already dissented interests and disputed frictional points that lead to further discord and strife. Historically, home to various Canaanite, Judahite, and Israelite states and presently located in the states of Canaan, Palestine and the Holy Land, the region of Israel is worshippable because it is the Land of Israel- a Biblical and a Torah figure of importance in the Jewish traditions. The way Israel got formed as it is today, is actually the basis of all squabbles and dissensions. Preceded by the rise and fall of Assyrians, Babylonians, Achaemenids, Hellenists, Romans, Arab Caliphates, the Crusaders, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Ottomans, and the Byzantines; the rise of Zionism in Israel was rather a dramatic one.

The British and the Americans have always had a soft corner for the Israeli homeland, not because of any kind of emotional attachment but because of the balanced approach that Americans and its NATO allies follow that allow them and force them to create a buffer state against the mighty Russian empire and its countable allies. Israel therefore, is a state that demarcates the end of the external influence of America over geopolitical issues and the beginning of the diplomatic and implicit tactics that are used in geopolitical circles to overawe innumerable things, et al. The 19th century, particularly the late 1940's saw the rise of these feelings that when, juxtaposed with the need to have Israeli homeland for the Hebrew people, led to mass movements amongst all those who were scattered around the world and were yearning to have their own secure homeland, after centuries of torture and exploitation. The Jews, who consider the Western Wall of the Holy Temple as the holiest of the pilgrimage sites

⁴ HOWARD SACHER, THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL (1976); JON HEINRICH AUGUSTE, THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL; MARTIN GILBERT, HISTORY OF ISRAEL (1978); ARI SHAVIT, THE PROMISED LAND (2013); RONEN BERGMAN, RISE AND KILL FIRST (2018); DAVID K. SHIPLER, ARABS AND JEWS (1986); ANITA SHAPIRA, THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL (2012).

in their ancient traditions, saw their present land captured by the Ottoman empire in the 1500's and being ruled by the Ottoman Syria for four centuries that came up next. However, the Durez Revolt destroyed the Safed and Tiberias and the late 18th century saw the setting up of an independent Emirate in the Galilee by an ordinary Arab trader Sheikh Zaahir al-Umar. The French and the British always had an interest in the area since the Industrial Revolution and even before that, because of the simple reason that the whole of the Arabian Peninsula and the Levantine had not, at any given point of time a particular ruler who could assemble and congregate the warring tribal leaders under one head of unity. Despite this, there were kingdoms that actually lay swath on vast pieces of this cherished land for ages, such as the Ottomans or the Byzantines being the most successful ones. But, this lacuna in guarding the area helped the foreign forces to expand their empires by practice of conquests and conquering. The French and the British saw a chance to proclaim their respective greatness by expanding their rule in these territories, by and large; before the Napoleon-led French forces were expelled after a crushing defeat by the Jazzar pasha, a Governor under the Ottoman Empire in the 1800's (right when the French Revolution was on its peak and Napoleon was busy acquiring territories and implementing his Napoleonic Code, that is still followed in the administration and organisation of the French Republic). This led the French to abandon Syria. The Jews had always earned to return to their 'ZION' (Israeli homeland). The Jewish diaspora was scattered far and beyond the international borders, comprised a minority in the present-day Palestine, also known as Old Yishuv. However, since the late 16th century to the early 1940's, the Jews struck to their four basic homelands known as Jerusalem, Tiberias, Hebron, and Safed. The Jews had been historically discriminated by the Islamic States and certain European States such as the Nazis of Germany under the autocratic rule of Adolf Hitler via the Holocaust programmes and other pogroms such as the May Laws of 1882 that increased economic and social discrimination against the Jews. Main reason that always comes out as a reliable one behind the atrocities that are meted out to the Jews is their wisdom and intelligence in entrepreneurship as well as the wealth that the community is able to gather through their limited resources, no matter where they are settled or forced to settle.

The Balfour Declaration of the year 1917, huge support for the Zionist State in Britain, the leadership of Lord Rothschild, the formation and growth of Jewish Legion, the formation of Jewish Militia known as Hagannah, the third and the fourth Aliyahs, the assent of the British to the Israelis to migrate to the then Muslim-dominated Palestinian area, the former Sykes Picot Agreement, and the future acceptance of the United Nations General Assembly for the State of

Israel, along with the head of the then Israeli State- David Ben Gurion declaring the establishment of the State of Israel- are all but, the factors that have resulted in the formation and growth of Israel. It is now easier to understand that the Israel State of present-day international world order is encircled by hostilities because of the deceiving agreement and subsequent White Paper created by the British and its allies for securing their Territorries in the Middle East as well as, leaving a region in turmoil for years to come, just to clean their hands off, of any kind of misdemeanour and territorial failure. The Palestinians have never recognised Israel as a legitimate territory and have always maintained that each and every inch covered by the Jews is their own territory, wrongfully snatched from them through deception and dirty geopolitics. The Jews have also not been, ever accepted by the Islamic State, totally because of their ethnicity as there always have been a conflict between the two religious' denominations. For this reason, both the Sunni and the Shia countries have not adhered to international legal principles and accepted Israel as a legitimate State. The various wars that Israel has fought with its neighbouring nations are well documented and are in public domain. It must be known that Israel is accepted as a full member of the United Nations General Assembly, whereas Palestine is not accepted as such, with recognition only been given as an Observer State. The recent terror attack (the diplomatic position that has been rightly and strictly maintained by India and many other nations) on October 7, 2023 in the Haifa administered area of Israel was carried out by the Hamas- also known as *Harkat al Muqawama al Islamiyah* and labelled as the Palestinian Sunni Islamist political and military group- is designated as a terrorist organisation by the United States of America and majority of the European nations. Though India does not designate the said organisation as a terrorist organisation in return of Lashkar-e-Toiba⁵ (a major terrorist organisation and organised crime syndicate targeting India's sovereignty) being designated as one by the Israeli State, recently there was an update whereby Hamas was declared as a 'party in conflict with Israel,' stopping short or directly holding it as a terror organisation.

The attack that was carried out by Hamas was deprecated by leaders world over and made the Israeli intelligence chief to resign from his coveted post. Many elderly, children, youngsters were taken as hostages by the organisation that is actually negatively acclaimed to have built a mesh of tunnels under the present Palestinian territory particularly, the Gaza Strip (also known as the largest open-air jail). The Israelis were quick to respond and targeted the territories of

⁵ THE UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES (PREVENTION) ACT 1967.

the said group in the Gaza Strip. The fight is still ensuing and the end is not in sight, still. The reaction to Israeli actions, was however quick. The Arabian States, including Egypt (with which Israel has already brokered a peace agreement) were quick to downslide the righteous Israeli actions. The United States of America and the European NATO Allies did and are doing whatever they can to secure an Israeli victory. However, now since the explicit war has hammered the already bleak Gazan resources and killed many people on either side, with casualties being numerous and more scathing on the Palestinian side (even though it is not the State of Palestine that has declared the war on Israel or sanctioned it, it is actually Hamas- a self-proclaimed organisation that vows to get Palestinian territory back, by hook or by crook), because of years of conflict and incessant misery. Today, Jordan is staunchly against the Israeli actions as it ever was and will in the future be (if status quo is maintained), Egypt and Lebanon have highly disregarded any more use of force against the hugely displaced people of Gaza- currently ailing for more international aid through the Rafah border check post of Egypt-, United States has told the Israelis to stop continuous and constant bombarding of housing units and residential areas of Gaza without any specific input on the terrorist' hideouts, India has also appealed the military forces to practice restraint and avoid human casualties and Iran has put into its own proxy war guerilla military unit- the Hezbollah (raised and bred in context with Lebanon) into the muddy waters because of the 'misfired' Israeli missile attack on the Iranian embassy in the Syrian territory- killing the highly revered Revolutionary Guards of Iran. This has caused innumerable ripples in the dirty waters of the continuous fight, which is looking more grim from an outsider's perspective- even if compared to the Russia- Ukraine conflict. Before moving further, it is undoubtedly necessary to look into the historical background⁶ of the Iran-Israel conflict regime. Both these nations were not always like this. They had an ambivalent period of neutrality and a period of steady friendship during the 1950's to the 1970's, before the Iranian or Islamic Revolution spearheaded and incited by Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, seized the powers and throne of the last Shah of Iran of the Pahlavi dynasty- Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, in the year 1979. The issue was all about secularism and Islamism, and today Iran is ruled by the latter ideology, being a completely internal matter of an independent sovereign State. But the issue that has to be dealt here is that the period before the Iranian Revolution was marked by high contribution and collaboration with the Western

⁶ PETERS MANSFIELD, THE HISTORY OF MIDDLE EAST (2009); GORDON KERR, SHORT HISTORY OF MIDDLE EAST: FROM ANCIENT EMPIRES TO ISLAMIC STATE (2016); EDWARD SAID, ORIENTALISM (2016); WILLIAM L. CLEVELAND, HISTORY OF MODERN MIDDLE EAST (2008); ALBERT HOURANI, HISTORY OF MODERN ARAB PEOPLE (1991).

and European powers in the international arena by Iran. Iran had always been against the Israeli admission to the United Nations and the Two-State Solution proposed for the Palestinian State. However, it was also the second Islamic State after Türkiye, to recognise it as an independent State with sovereign independent backing in the international arena. However, the cold relations between the two began after the loss of Iraq in the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Relative power in the region shifted to Iran and Israel, effectively, as other powers collapsed without any staunch Head of the State. It was Ritzak Rabin's government that had a more strict posture on Iran and complicated the intricacies of the already-strained relationship between the two nations. Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, the then Prime Minister of Iran also led to a number of conflicts by giving innumerable inflammatory and derogatory statements against the then Israeli government. Since the late 1980's, both the nations have been engaged in proxy conflict. Israel is known as 'Little Satan' by the Iranians and the United States, is known as the 'Great Satan.' It must be understood that bitter rivalry has been brewing in the American-Iranian relationship as well, due to sudden American pullout from the Nuclear Deal, the blowout of which was averted significantly due to change in American administration and smart diplomatic tactics.

Iran has supported the outfits and groups that attack Israel and the US. Hezbollah in Lebanon, formed in the 1980s to fight Israel's occupation in southern Lebanon, has the backing of Iran. Hezbollah has been sending rockets into northern Israel since the beginning of the Gaza war. Iran also supports Hamas, the armed Palestinian group that led the October 7 attack on southern Israel. The current war has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, over the past six months, according to Gaza health authorities. Iran has also provided support to Houthi rebels in Yemen, who fired ballistic missiles at Israeli resort town on the Red Sea. Iran also backs the Syrian regime of President Bashar Assad, and Israel says Tehran uses Syrian territory to ship missiles and other weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel has carried out numerous airstrikes in Syria to stop that flow of weapons, and said the Iranian general killed in the consulate strike in Damascus was a key figure in that logistical chain. Therefore, it is but clear, that the whole territory of the Middle East is so engaged in war with its own self, finding it very difficult to find a way out, even though there is, only because of constantly changing dynamics and interests of respective nations.

III. INDIA'S REACTION TO THE CURRENT SITUATION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS AMIDST TURMOIL

What started in 2019 as attacks between two hostile neighbours has now escalated to a full-fledged stage that can explode into a real war, complicated by the already worsening situation in the Middle East. The first trigger can be attributed to a 2019 attack by the Israel Air Force via an airstrike that killed two Iranian trained militia in Syria (Syria also being an Iranian ally and Iran's current disposition is staunchly in support of Bashar-al-Assad), coupled with a drone that was set-off to blast near a Hezbollah office in Lebanon and an airstrike in Qaim, Iraq killing yet again, and Iranian trained Iraqi militia. This was done by Israel because it was of the opinion that Iran was trying to establish an overland arms-supply line through Iraq and Northern Syria to Lebanon- which would have in either case scenario harmed Israel covertly and overtly both. These strikes were carried out by Israel to stop Iran and give its proxies a strong message that Israel will, in no case tolerate a system of systematised smart missiles on its borderline. This episode is quite reminiscent of Israel's previous justified impatience when Syria had started lining missile and rocket systems on its borders and it then planted a world-renowned spy to tackle its enemy. Only then, the steps taken by Israel were covert and HUMINT (Human intelligence based) and quite different from today's overt operations.

If one talks in terms of intelligence gathering and information-sharing in a constantly changing geopolitical world, one is reminded of a very famous phrase that is quoted extensively (in his memoir, *A Life in the Shadows*, A.S. Dulat explains the network and methods of information gathering and marshalling of intelligence from the same by faceless but fearless heroes of our nation) by former R&AW Chief A.S. Dulat- "*The Wilderness of Mirrors.*" This means that a person will only see what the other person wants him or her to see. Applying the same in the international arena, it is so tough to gauge the actions of the enemy or for that matter, neighbour, or any friendly country as well, that it is all smokes and dust. It is not TECHNIT (technical intelligence) or any kind of machine intelligence that is going to clear out the mirror. It is the human intelligence that is meant to sort it out all by ways engaging or collaborating or disagreeing with the other nation. Coming to our situation at hand, Israel only got to know about this groundwork of missile systems and other steps being taken by Iran and Syria along with Lebanon, when it actually prodded the matter and cleared the dust out of that mirror. Here, it is again pertinent to mention that another former R&AW Chief, former IPoS, Vikram Sood has also mentioned the ways of finding out the actual thing that your enemy or neighbour is

doing by clearing out the mesh that is created to cover it. Israel succeeded in getting the root of all the activities that were going right under its nose, which would have been proved to be completely catastrophic if allowed to happen, in today's scenario. What followed was another thing of Israel that irked Iran and that was the satisfaction that Israel expressed on an American drone missile attack in Baghdad, killing the commander of foreign facing arm of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps- Major General Qassim Suleimani. Iran did not stop before retaliating by attacking two bases in Iraq of the American troops with hundreds of missiles. It must be remembered that India, on both these occasions urged the warring and sparring nations to stop retaliating successively and exercising restraint, instead.

Following this, an Israeli managed oil-tanker was attacked by the Iranian guards resulting in fatalities. But what really flared the 2022 season of hostilities was the killing of Iran's top nuclear scientist Mohsin Fakhrizadeh, followed up by the assassination of Revolutionary Guards Commander, Colonel Sayad Khodayee, resulting in large scale protests in Iranian streets. Balancing a tough but refined stance on the hostilities being attributed between the two enemy nations, India always stood by diplomatic backchannel talks and dialogue cooperation, instead of regular face-offs, which in any case are not going result into any peaceful resolution, but only an aggravated situation. India has always had good relations with Iran, even though it did not whole-heartedly support or welcome the Iranian Revolution of the year 1979. In spite of that and a seemingly Pakistan-siding stance of Iran on Kashmir, over the years- India has tried to keep its old friend happy in the backdrop of recent approval to sign the 20-year-old Chabahar deal and other cooperation areas. After Israel's bombardment of Gaza, as explained earlier, Iranian backed multi-fronted militia started bombing Israel and accused it of killing a high-level military figure named Brigadier General Sayyed Razi Mousavi in a missile strike in Syria. He was a major figure in the Iranian-Hezbollah dealings as he oversaw the shipment of arms and missiles to the latter. What escalated the already hostile and dilapidated situation was the Israeli-backed explosion in Beirut, Lebanon killing Saleh-al-Arouri, a Hamas leader along with two other commanders and which was seen as a first fatality of top Hamas leadership. What has complicated the matter further is that, Iran and Russia have become close trading partners. Having a bird's eye view from India's stance of the situation, one can know how difficult it must be to balance all of our interests in the region. Iran sides with Lebanon due to shared religion and ethnicity (keeping aside the Sunni-Shia conflict as the situation in the region does not allow them to engage in petty ethnic issues); Lebanon has Iran bred Shia militia Hezbollah that helps it to keep Israel on its foot and guard its border, because Israel had in the

past occupied parts of Lebanon in Yom-Kippur and other wars; Hezbollah in Lebanon is so stringent in its position and backed by strong ammunition support of Iran that it fears virtually no international organisation when attacking Israel; Jordan has always been against Israel (even though it was one of the first nations to recognise its sovereignty) because of the strengthened religion-based politics that dominates the whole region; Egypt even though is on good relations with Israel cannot always support it due to constantly changing dynamics and current 'personally-motivated' disposition of Israel which is not leaving any stone unturned in keeping the 'war pot' on boil and of course the Sinai Peninsula debacle of the past; Syria being a staunch ally of Iran will not even think of siding with Israel; the ISIS and the war against it is marred by proxy wars between Iran, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Russia, United States of America and the rest of NATO- fuelled more powerfully when the issue of Kurds and Türkiye's ethnic minority is bought up; and last but not the least the Hamas as well as the Palestinian cause that has no peaceful end in sight (except for dialogue and a two-state solution, that is being proposed and repeatedly pronounced by India).

India has well-developing trade relations with each and every nation that has been mentioned above. The economic, political, diplomatic, cultural, social, and traditional backing of these relations is so strong that India cannot even imagine living in a more complicated mess, if it does get going that way. Aggravation of the situation is caused by the Russian backing of Iranian actions, because Russia by default has to stay against America and vice-versa. So there, nothing can be even attempted to be changed. Recently, in March as well, an Israeli drone had hit a car in southern Lebanon, killing at least one person which was claimed to be a military commander yet again, and incessant airstrikes in Syria that killed innumerable soldiers in Syria. Coming to most recent attack by Israel on Iran, Iran launched a barrage of more than 300 drones and missiles at Israel, an unexpectedly very large-scale retaliation (even for the turbulent area that it is), although all of the Israel was saved by the tough technical protection system known as the Iron Dome. Consequently, Iranian city of Isfahan was targeted by Israel. Iran pounded almost sixty tons of explosives directly at Israel, which by any means also shatters the standard unwritten rules of international world order.

India's stakes in the conflict are too high to allow it to escalate, mindlessly. India does not, in any case want the tensions to increase and the friction points to expand. India is friendly with both Israel and Iran and has historically strong relations with both the nations. India has been able to balance its relationship with both the nations, beautifully and meticulously. India's interests in the region are mainly revolving around the expatriate community, people-to-people contacts and connections, economic and trade-related needs and last but not the least, the

diplomatic and strategic interests. The serious concern aired by the Indian authorities on the first attack by Israel on the Iranian backed Lebanon territory was that of ‘prompt positioning.’ The exact official statement is worthy of being reproduced, ‘We are seriously concerned at the escalation of the hostilities between Israel and Iran which threatens the peace and security of the region. We call for immediate de-escalation, exercise of restraint, stepping back from violence, and return to the path of diplomacy, it is vital that security and stability are maintained in the region.’ⁱ Iranian based groups had also seized a US-bound oil tanker off the coast of Oman carrying at least twenty Indians on board. Even though there is nothing to worry about the same, but it shows that countries and people not at direct conflict with others in the strife, suffer because of universal discord and heightening anxieties. Since past October 2023, when Israel started attacking Hamas in retaliatory rights, India has had extensive dialogues with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine, including many others to express serious concern on the expected widening conflict. Even, the current Prime Minister of India has had extensive dialogues with Egyptian and French leadership that has forwarded and expressed similar concerns on various international fora.

IV. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

India can follow certain pointers in managing her relations with warring parties and having a cordial relationship with others at the same time. Firstly, since Israel has become a very important partner of India in the recent years and that India has completed 25 years of strategic partnership with it, it becomes imperative and highly pertinent to express genuine concerns about the growing hostility against Israel’s continuous attacks which are now turning the Gaza area into a complete humanitarian failure. What started as a justified attack on the terrorist organisation of Hamas has now put a whole population in peril. This has not only called for de-escalation of hostilities from America but also from the entire world community. For this, India must continue to engage with Israel on diplomatic level and in back-channel talks. Secondly, India must also engage with Tehran in the same manner as Iran supplies a lot of crude oil to India and has interests in the mighty Chabahar deal that is a cherry on the top of a beautiful crafted Indian diplomatic cake in the Middle East. The dialogue with the Shia majority state must continue and concerns must be raised at the appropriate levels. Thirdly, The Western powers and the NATO allies have a lot of militaries, strategic and diplomatic interest in the region backed by strong historical factors and present geopolitical ideological perspectives. India must engage with them as well on appropriate levels and express its very concerns on

different forums with them as well. Fourthly, India must also actively engage with the Central Asian region nations to apprise them of her position currently and plausible position in the future amidst conflicting interests. Some might say that this is too much of far-sightedness but this far-sightedness if used right now, can be beneficial for India, if God Forbid, the war escalates. Fifthly, India must and as a matter of fact on priority engage with Russia because of its involvement in the two wars that are ongoing in the larger Asian and East-European region (overtly and covertly, both) because Russia being a friendly and most trusted ally of India will always take care of Indian interests. Sixthly and lastly, India must not bend down under the pressure of any ideological perspective and thinking straightly, should just pinpoint its own strategic interests clearly while upholding much cherished principles of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and rules-based multipolar international order regime. Conclusively, it is a well-known fact that there are no permanent enemies or friends in the international law realm, there are only permanent interests. India, must be more attentively cognizant of this fact and structure its already applaudable foreign policy in the same way.



WHITE BLACK
LEGAL