India’s West Asia policy

Why in news?

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- In November, India held its first joint commission meeting with the Palestinian Authority and **this week will send a representative to a Paris meeting on reviving the West Asia peace process**.
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Are these moves mean something?

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- **None of this is path-breaking** and still a far cry from the pre-1990 days when India was a vociferous supporter of the Palestinian cause.
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- But there are reasons India is considering tentative steps in this direction.
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What are the reasons?

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- **One,** the transformation of relations between India and the UAE, with Saudi Arabia and Qatar a few steps behind, has meant the present government is beginning to shape what its officials call a “greater West Asia” policy.
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- Besides some standard diplomatic and economic interests**, India probably sees an opportunity to reduce Pakistan’s standing** in a part of the world from which it has long received blind support.
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- **Two,** Modi is personally a source of suspicion across much of the Arab and Muslim world thanks to the shadow of the 2002 Gujarat riots.
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- Part of New Delhi’s problem is that it is **increasingly hard to find Arab**

interlocutors it is comfortable with. There are few functional examples of the secular, if largely undemocratic, Arab political parties or movements that India has traditionally preferred.
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- **Three, India is likely to further expand its relationship with Israel.**
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- Already the larger importer of Israeli arms in the world, India now has a security relationship that extends to the most sensitive defence areas like nuclear weapons technology and doctrine.
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- Modi's additional interest in the relationship is water. Israel is the acknowledged world leader in this area and the PM wants this to be a new pillar in the relationship.
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Do the renewed Palestine interest help India?

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- New Delhi knows that as it becomes closer to Tel Aviv there is an inevitable blowback in the Arab world. Showing renewed interest in Palestine is a useful means to help counter this.
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- **New Delhi has used support for Palestinian nationalism as a foil to counter criticism of its shift to Tel Aviv for decades.**
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- Interestingly, in the joint commission meeting the Palestinians said they were pleased to talk to India because of its presumed influence on the Israelis.
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Will we involve in West Asian peace process?

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- New Delhi has **no interest in getting directly involved** in the West Asian peace process. It has neither the means and interest nor the diplomatic heft to do so.
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- And arguably there could be no worse time to do so than now — when polls show that support for a two-nation solution is at its lowest point among both

Israelis and Palestinians.
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- That the cause is being suddenly picked up by the lamest of lame duck governments — Ex. The outgoing Barack Obama — is a sign what the international community actually thinks about its prospects.
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Conclusion:

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- India has other problems. One of them is **its refusal to deal with Hamas,** the Palestinian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, because of its dislike for non-secular Islamic groups. But to talk Palestine without Hamas is like speaking a language without vowels.
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- None of this will matter for now. New Delhi's interest in Palestine is about issues other than Palestine itself.
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- As is true for much of the world. India's proposal to build an infotech park in Gaza may be the most important and tangible contribution it can make to the Palestinians.
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