

ISRAEL-UAE-IRAN STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT

Abraham Accords, Iron Dome Diplomacy & Shifting Gulf Alliances

GS Paper	GS II (International Relations) GS III (Internal Security & Technology)
Essay Themes	Strategic Autonomy Civilisational Realpolitik Shifting Alliances
Ethics Dimensions	Sovereignty, State Interest vs. Humanitarian Obligations
APSC Relevance	Northeast India & India's Look East/Act East Policy linkages
Difficulty Level	Advanced — suitable for Mains and Essay preparation

14-Section Analytical Framework

Section 01: Key Terms and Explanations

Understanding the strategic realignment unfolding in West Asia requires command over a cluster of interlinked concepts — military, diplomatic, theological, and geopolitical. Each term below is not merely definitional; it opens a window into a dimension of statecraft that directly feeds UPSC analytical questions.

A. Military Technology Terms

- **Iron Dome** Iron Dome:
 - A short-range, all-weather air defence system developed by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries.
 - Designed to intercept rockets, artillery shells, and mortars with ranges of 4 to 70 kilometres.
 - Uses radar-based detection and TAMIR interceptor missiles; has claimed intercept success rates above 85% in active conflict scenarios.
 - Its deployment outside Israeli territory — to the UAE — marks a historic first, signifying not just technology transfer but the depth of a security partnership forged through the Abraham Accords.
- **Iron Beam** Iron Beam:
 - Israel's next-generation laser-based directed energy weapon system, capable of neutralising UAVs, rockets, and mortars at very short range using high-energy lasers.
 - Operates at a cost-per-intercept far lower than conventional missile-based systems, making it operationally sustainable for high-volume drone warfare.
 - Its joint deployment with Iron Dome to the UAE signals that Israel is offering its most advanced and experimental systems to its Gulf partner — a marker of deep strategic trust.

B. Diplomatic and Political Concepts

- **Abraham Accords** Abraham Accords (2020):
 - A series of normalisation agreements brokered by the United States under the Trump administration between Israel and several Arab states — the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco.
 - Named after the patriarch Abraham, common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, to symbolise inter-faith coexistence.
 - Broke the decades-old Arab consensus requiring Palestinian statehood as a precondition for normalisation with Israel.

- Enabled commercial, diplomatic, and security cooperation between Israel and Gulf Arab states, fundamentally reshaping the West Asian security architecture.
- **Vilayat-e-Faqih** Vilayat-e-Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist):
 - The foundational political doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran, articulated by Ayatollah Khomeini.
 - Holds that in the absence of the Hidden Imam (in Shia belief), supreme political and religious authority must rest with a qualified Islamic jurist — currently the Supreme Leader.
 - This doctrine explains the ideological continuity of Iran's hostility towards Israel: it is not merely a policy position but a theologically grounded rejection of Israel's legitimacy.
- **OPEC / OPEC+** OPEC / OPEC+ and their significance:
 - OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) is a cartel of major oil-producing nations that coordinates petroleum policies to stabilise prices.
 - OPEC+ extends this grouping to include non-OPEC producers like Russia, forming a broader coalition.
 - The UAE's withdrawal from OPEC+ — driven partly by strategic frustration with Saudi Arabia — signals a willingness to prioritise national economic sovereignty over cartel solidarity, with significant implications for global oil markets.
- **Wahhabism** Wahhabism:
 - A puritanical, ultra-conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam originating in the Arabian Peninsula, founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century.
 - Became the religious foundation of the Saudi state through its alliance with the House of Saud.
 - The UAE under MBZ has explicitly moved away from Wahhabi exclusivism — allowing worship spaces for non-Muslim faiths, promoting social liberalisation, and embracing a more pluralist civic identity. This divergence from Saudi Arabia is ideologically significant.

C. Geopolitical Actors and Frameworks

- **MBZ / MBS Divergence** Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) vs. Mohammed bin Salman (MBS):
 - MBZ (Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan) is the President of the UAE and ruler of Abu Dhabi. He represents a pragmatic, liberal-leaning, post-Wahhabi statecraft.
 - MBS (Mohammed bin Salman) is Saudi Crown Prince. While liberalising Saudi society domestically, he is constrained by the theological compact between the House of Saud and Wahhabism.
 - Their emerging rivalry signals the fracture of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) unity, which has significant consequences for regional security architecture and India's Gulf policy.
- **Tunbs and Abu Musa** Tunbs and Abu Musa Islands:
 - Three strategically located islands in the Strait of Hormuz region — Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb (disputed by Iran and Ras al-Khaimah), and Abu Musa (disputed between Iran and Sharjah).
 - Occupied by Iran in November 1971, just days before the UAE's formal formation in December 1971, under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.
 - This act of territorial seizure embedded a deep sense of grievance into the UAE's founding national memory, making Iran the UAE's principal existential threat long before the Khomeini revolution.
- **Camp David Accords** Camp David Accords (1978):
 - A peace agreement brokered by US President Jimmy Carter between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli PM Menachem Begin.
 - Egypt became the first Arab state to formally recognise Israel. Sadat was subsequently assassinated in 1981. The Accords were condemned by both Arab states and Khomeini's Iran as a betrayal of Palestinian and pan-Arab solidarity.

- The Accords established the template for Arab-Israeli normalisation that the Abraham Accords later followed on a broader scale.

UPSC Examiner Insight

Terms like Vilayat-e-Faqih, Iron Dome, Abraham Accords, and OPEC+ are high-frequency in GS II Mains. The ability to link military technology (Iron Beam) to diplomatic agreements (Abraham Accords) to civilisational ideology (Wahhabism vs. pluralism) in a single flowing answer is what separates the top scorers. Practise integrating these terms analytically, not definitionally.

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Section 02: Main Arguments and Substantive Analysis

The strategic realignment taking shape in West Asia is not a product of a single agreement or a single leader's decision. It is the convergence of decades of suppressed hostility, ideological divergence, and shifting security calculus. Breaking this down systematically reveals the multi-layered logic that UPSC demands students appreciate.

Core Thesis

- The deployment of advanced Israeli air defence systems to the UAE represents the operational manifestation of a strategic partnership that has been building for nearly three decades — rooted not just in recent diplomacy, but in historical grievances, theological fault lines, and the pragmatic logic of a shared threat.
- The Abraham Accords of 2020 were a formal diplomatic acknowledgement of what had already been true in private conversations among Gulf leaders: that Israel and the UAE share a common adversary in Iran and a common interest in containing its regional influence.
- This is no ordinary alliance of convenience — it has deep civilisational, ideological, and security dimensions that India must understand to navigate its own complex relationships with all three actors: Israel, the UAE, and Iran.

Argument 1: The Security Logic of the Israel-UAE Convergence

- The UAE has faced consistent, asymmetric military pressure from Iran — drone and missile attacks that, according to the UAE's own senior officials, were met with silence from its Gulf neighbours, including Saudi Arabia.
- Iran's proxy network — which includes the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and various militias in Iraq and Syria — places states like the UAE in a permanent state of threat-readiness.
- Iron Dome and Iron Beam are not merely weapons; they are force multipliers that allow a state with a small population to defend against mass missile and drone attacks. Their transfer to the UAE is a security assurance that no diplomatic communique can match.
- For Israel, this deployment achieves two objectives: it deepens an alliance with a wealthy Gulf partner while demonstrating the export viability of its defence technology — a foreign policy tool in itself.

Argument 2: The Ideological Roots of UAE-Iran Enmity

- The UAE's hostility towards Iran predates the Khomeini Revolution. The Shah's occupation of the Tunbs and Abu Musa in 1971 created a foundational wound — a territorial violation at the moment of the UAE's birth.
- This sense of historical injury was compounded by Persian cultural condescension towards Arab Bedouin societies — a civilisational tension that has never been resolved and which gives the UAE-Iran conflict an emotional depth beyond mere geopolitics.
- Khomeini's Iran added a theological layer: the Islamic Republic's ideological mission to export the revolution and its refusal to recognise Israel also translated into a posture of regional dominance that small Gulf states found deeply threatening.
- By 1997, as revealed through a diplomatic conversation involving India's then External Affairs Minister I.K. Gujral and UAE's Abdullah bin Zayed, the UAE was privately contemplating alignment with Israel against Iran — a bombshell thought for that era, now a geopolitical reality.

Argument 3: The Saudi-UAE Fracture and its Implications

- The Arab Gulf has historically presented a united front within the GCC. However, the divergence between MBZ and MBS reflects a genuine strategic and ideological split.
- MBZ has allowed other faiths to build places of worship, positioned Dubai as a global financial hub, withdrawn from OPEC+, and openly allied with Israel — each of these represents a departure from traditional Wahhabi-influenced Gulf statecraft.
- MBS, despite domestic liberalisation — allowing cinema, women driving, music festivals — cannot fully replicate MBZ's moves because the House of Saud derives its legitimacy from its custodianship of Islam's holiest sites and its historical partnership with Wahhabism.
- The UAE's sense of isolation during Iranian attacks — without GCC solidarity — accelerated its pivot towards Israel and away from the Riyadh-centred Gulf order. This is a structural shift, not a temporary rupture.

Argument 4: India's Strategic Blind Spot

- India's foreign policy in the Gulf has long been organised around the primacy of Saudi Arabia — driven by oil imports, remittances from the Indian diaspora, and strategic necessity.
- However, an India that gives primacy to one Gulf state while ignoring the emerging UAE-Israel axis, the Iran factor, and the Saudi-UAE divergence risks strategic miscalculation in a region that accounts for a substantial share of India's energy security and diaspora welfare.
- India must develop a more granular, multi-vector Gulf policy — one that engages with tribal and theological roots of Gulf societies, tracks internecine dynamics, and calibrates relationships accordingly.
- Notably, India's own relationship with Iran — historically warm, rooted in the Chabahar port agreement and energy ties — is now under pressure as Iran is visibly destabilised by Israeli strikes and Gulf isolation.

Counterarguments to Consider

Critics argue that the Israel-UAE axis remains fragile — the Palestinian question has not disappeared, and Arab publics remain deeply sympathetic to Palestinian statehood. There is also a risk that the UAE's open embrace of Israel alienates it from the broader Muslim world, affecting its soft power in South Asia and Africa. The sustainability of this alignment depends on whether the Iran threat remains primary in UAE strategic calculus — any diplomatic opening between the US and Iran could alter the calculus dramatically.

Section 03: Historical Evolution of the Issue

The roots of the present strategic realignment run deep — through colonial cartographies, post-Ottoman state formation, Cold War rivalries, revolutionary theology, and the quiet diplomacy of a half-century. UPSC frequently rewards answers that demonstrate this long-arc historical awareness.

1947–48	Establishment of the State of Israel. Arab states refuse recognition. First Arab-Israeli War. Palestinian displacement (Nakba) embeds Arab hostility to Israel for decades.
1967	Six-Day War. Israel captures West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, and Golan Heights. UN Resolution 242 calls for Israeli withdrawal. Arab world issues the Khartoum Declaration: no peace, no recognition, no negotiation.
1971	UAE formally established (December 2). Just days before, Shah of Iran occupies Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa — three strategic islands in the Gulf. This territorial seizure marks the founding wound of UAE-Iran relations.
1978	Egypt-Israel Camp David Accords. Egypt becomes first Arab state to recognise Israel. Arab world is outraged. Anwar Sadat is subsequently assassinated (1981). Khomeini condemns the Accords as a betrayal.
1979	Khomeini Revolution in Iran. Shah flees in January; Khomeini returns in February. Iran becomes the Islamic Republic, formalising ideological hostility to Israel and a doctrine of regional revolutionary export.
1980–88	Iran-Iraq War. Gulf Arab states, including the UAE, back Iraq out of fear of Iranian expansionism. Iran's regional ambitions become a defining threat for the Arab Gulf.
1990–91	Gulf War. Iraq invades Kuwait. US-led coalition liberates Kuwait. US military presence in the Gulf becomes permanent. Gulf states become dependent on US security guarantees.
1997	UAE Minister Abdullah bin Zayed privately tells India's EAM I.K. Gujral that the UAE can imagine 'being in the same trenches with Israel against Iran.' This private statement anticipates the Abraham Accords by 23 years.
2003	US invasion of Iraq. Saddam Hussein's fall dramatically empowers Iran's Shia networks across the region — Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria. Iran's 'Axis of Resistance' expands, deepening UAE alarm.
2011	Arab Spring destabilises multiple Arab states. UAE and Saudi Arabia intervene in Bahrain. The instability reinforces the Gulf monarchies' shared interest in containing revolution — whether Islamist or Iranian-backed.
2015	Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). Gulf Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia and UAE, are alarmed that a diplomatic opening to Iran will embolden it regionally. Trump subsequently withdraws the US from JCPOA in 2018.
2020	Abraham Accords signed. UAE and Bahrain normalise relations with Israel under US brokering. Sudan and Morocco follow. The Palestinian Authority condemns the move. Israel gains Arab legitimacy without a Palestinian state.
2023–24	October 7 Hamas attack on Israel. Israel launches massive military campaign in Gaza. Houthi attacks from Yemen on Gulf shipping intensify. Iran's proxies activate across the region. UAE faces escalated missile and drone threats.

2025–26

Israel deploys Iron Dome and Iron Beam to the UAE for the first time outside Israeli territory. The operational security alliance becomes visible and undeniable. UAE withdraws from OPEC+.

Historical Pattern to Note for UPSC

Notice how private diplomatic conversations (1997 Gujral-Abdullah meeting) preceded formal agreements (2020 Abraham Accords) by over two decades. This illustrates the concept of 'shadow diplomacy' — where states build understanding in advance of formal structures. For UPSC, the ability to trace how strategic convergences mature over time is a mark of sophisticated international relations analysis.

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Section 04: Logical and Philosophical Foundations

Behind every strategic realignment lies a structure of ideas — philosophical assumptions about the nature of states, the logic of alliances, the role of ideology, and the ethics of security. UPSC's GS IV and Essay papers reward students who can articulate these deeper foundations.

A. Realist Logic: The Primacy of the Threat

- The Israel-UAE alignment is a textbook illustration of Balance of Threat Theory (Stephen Walt), a refinement of classical realism. States align not merely against powerful neighbours but against those perceived as threatening — based on geographic proximity, offensive capability, and perceived intentions.
- Iran's geographic proximity to the UAE, its growing missile and drone arsenal, its ideological hostility to Gulf monarchies, and its active proxy warfare (Houthis, Hezbollah, Iraqi militias) create a threat perception in the UAE that is both military and existential.
- Under this logic, the Abraham Accords are not merely diplomacy — they are a security contract, where two states that share a threat calculus formalise their defensive alignment.

B. Constructivist Logic: Identity and Historical Grievance

- Constructivism in international relations argues that state behaviour is shaped not just by material factors (military capability, geography) but by ideational ones — identity, norms, historical memory.
- The UAE's founding wound — Iran's occupation of the Tunbs and Abu Musa — is not merely a territorial dispute. It is embedded in the UAE's national identity as a founding injustice, shaping how subsequent generations of UAE leaders perceive Iran.
- Similarly, Iran's ideological rejection of Israel is not a policy position but a constitutive element of the Islamic Republic's identity, embedded in its revolutionary founding documents and the Vilayat-e-Faqih doctrine.
- When these identity-based hostilities align with material threats, the resulting conflicts tend to be more intense and more durable than purely interest-based rivalries. This is why UAE-Iran and Israel-Iran conflicts are so resistant to diplomatic resolution.

C. Liberal Institutionalism and Its Limits

- Liberal institutionalism (Keohane, Nye) holds that international institutions, economic interdependence, and diplomatic frameworks can manage inter-state conflict. The GCC was meant to embody this logic for the Gulf.
- The UAE-Saudi fracture, the UAE's withdrawal from OPEC+, and the inability of Arab states to rally behind the UAE during Iranian attacks all suggest that Gulf institutionalism has shallow roots. When security stakes are high, states revert to bilateral alignments over multilateral solidarity.
- The Abraham Accords represent a form of security architecture that bypasses traditional Arab institutional frameworks — the Arab League, the GCC — and directly creates bilateral or unilateral security arrangements.

D. Philosophical Dimensions: Ethics of Alliances and Sovereignty

- From a Kantian perspective, a world of stable, rights-respecting states requires that alliances be built on shared principles rather than merely shared interests. The Israel-UAE alliance is primarily interest-based, which raises questions about its durability when interests diverge.
- From Kautilya's Arthashastra — highly relevant for UPSC — the Mandala Theory (circle of states) predicts that neighbouring states are natural rivals while states beyond the immediate neighbour are natural allies. The UAE and Israel, separated by geography but sharing a common threat in Iran, fit this Kautilyan logic of the 'enemy's enemy as friend.'
- Rawlsian ethics raises a harder question: the Abraham Accords normalise Israel's relations with Arab states while leaving the Palestinian people without statehood. From behind the 'veil of ignorance' — not knowing whether you are Israeli, Emirati, or Palestinian — would one endorse this arrangement? This is a powerful essay angle.
- Hannah Arendt's concept of 'statelessness' — the condition of those denied political membership — is directly applicable to Palestinians, who remain stateless while their cause is quietly traded away in Gulf diplomacy.

E. Epistemological Reflection: What the 1997 Conversation Reveals

- The revelation that a senior UAE official contemplated an alliance with Israel against Iran in 1997 — a bombshell in context — illustrates a key epistemological lesson: the formal record of international relations often conceals the actual strategic reality.
- This means that studying international relations through official statements, treaties, and declarations is insufficient. The real architecture of alliances is often built in private conversations, back channels, and unreported meetings — which only become visible in hindsight or through diplomatic memoirs.
- For aspirants, this underscores the value of reading diplomatic memoirs, retired diplomat analyses, and investigative foreign policy journalism alongside official government positions.

Philosophical Synthesis for Essay

The Israel-UAE-Iran triangle is a theatre where Kautilyan realpolitik, constructivist identity politics, liberal institutionalism's failure, and Kantian ethics of legitimate alliance all intersect. An essay on 'Shifting Alliances and the Ethics of Geopolitics' can deploy this framework to demonstrate intellectual depth — beginning with the particular (Iron Dome to the UAE) and ascending to the universal (what kind of international order do shifting alliances produce?).

Section 05: New Features and Unique Ideas in This Strategic Shift

What makes the current West Asian realignment analytically interesting is that it breaks multiple established patterns simultaneously. Recognising these novelties — and evaluating their feasibility — is exactly what UPSC Mains questions on international relations probe.

A. First-Ever Deployment of Israeli Air Defences Outside Israel

- The export of Iron Dome and Iron Beam to the UAE marks the first time Israel has deployed its air defence systems on foreign soil — a precedent with profound implications for the global arms trade, technology sovereignty, and the emerging architecture of Middle Eastern security.
- This is more than a weapons sale; it is an operational alliance. Israeli military personnel accompany the systems, creating a de facto joint operational presence — a level of integration previously seen only between Israel and the United States.
- For global arms exporters — including India, which is expanding its defence exports — this demonstrates how defence technology can serve as a relationship anchor, not merely a commercial product.

B. The Theological Rupture: UAE's Post-Wahhabi Identity

- Perhaps the most underappreciated novel element of this story is the UAE's deliberate construction of a post-Wahhabi national identity. By allowing non-Muslim places of worship, promoting liberal social norms, and embracing a pluralist civic culture, MBZ is doing something unprecedented in the history of Arab Gulf statehood.
- This is not merely social reform — it is a strategic identity shift, designed to make the UAE attractive to global capital, talent, and diplomatic partnerships that would be impossible under traditional Wahhabi norms.
- It positions the UAE as a civilisational alternative to both Saudi Arabian Wahhabism and Iranian Vilayat-e-Faqih — a pragmatic, pluralist, commercially dynamic model of Arab Muslim governance.

C. Minilateralism Replacing Multilateralism in Gulf Security

- The traditional multilateral frameworks of Gulf security — GCC, Arab League — are increasingly being bypassed in favour of minilateral arrangements: small groupings of states aligned around specific shared interests.
- The Abraham Accords created an Israel-UAE-Bahrain minilateral. The deployment of Iron Dome adds a security dimension. The I2U2 Group (India, Israel, UAE, USA) represents another minilateral that includes a South Asian dimension.
- This trend toward minilateralism — visible globally in the Quad, AUKUS, and now West Asia — represents a structural shift in how security is organised, moving away from universal international institutions toward selective, interest-based groupings. India's engagement with I2U2 gives it a direct stake in this emerging architecture.

D. The UAE's Energy Independence Gambit: Leaving OPEC+

- The UAE's exit from OPEC+ is strategically novel — no major OPEC member had taken this step before while remaining a significant oil producer. It signals the UAE's confidence in its ability to chart an independent energy policy.

- This move can be read as a form of strategic decoupling from Saudi Arabia — using energy policy as a vehicle to signal geopolitical independence. The UAE calculates that its sixth-largest oil reserves give it enough leverage to operate outside the cartel.
- However, the limits of this independence are real: OPEC+ countries will continue to dominate global oil pricing, meaning the UAE will face trade-offs between production freedom and market discipline. The UAE's diversified, non-oil economy (tourism, finance, logistics) gives it more resilience than oil-dependent neighbours.

E. India's I.K. Gujral Doctrine and the Revelation of 1997

- The disclosure of the 1997 Gujral-Abdullah conversation is itself a novel contribution to the public understanding of Gulf diplomacy. It reveals that the UAE's private strategic thinking was, by 1997, already far ahead of what its public posture suggested.
- For India, this carries a specific lesson: the Gujral Doctrine — India's approach of giving unilateral concessions to smaller neighbours to build goodwill — was in play here as India maintained open relations with Iran (then supporting anti-Taliban alliances together). Yet the UAE's private strategic thinking was already pointing towards Israel.
- This episode suggests that India's foreign policy intelligence — its capacity to read the private strategic intentions of partners — was ahead of its formal policy in this instance. Formalising such intelligence-gathering through structured diplomatic analysis is a key recommendation emerging from this episode.

Feasibility Assessment

The Israel-UAE security partnership is highly feasible in the short to medium term, grounded in genuine shared threat perceptions and complementary strategic assets. Its long-term viability faces three constraints: (a) the Palestinian question retains mobilising power in Arab public opinion; (b) any Iran-US rapprochement could reduce the shared threat calculus; and (c) the Saudi-UAE divergence, if deepened, could complicate the broader regional architecture within which the Israel-UAE axis is embedded.

Section 06: Sustainability of the Strategic Realignment

Every strategic realignment carries within it the seeds of its own transformation. Whether the Israel-UAE axis endures, deepens, or fractures will depend on several long-run variables — across security, economics, ideology, international law, and societal legitimacy. UPSC Mains questions often probe these sustainability dimensions.

A. Security Sustainability

- As long as Iran maintains its current posture — missile and drone development, proxy warfare, ideological hostility to both Israel and Gulf monarchies — the threat perception that holds the Israel-UAE alliance together will persist.
- However, if a future Iranian leadership moderated its regional behaviour — or if the US brokered a new nuclear deal that came with Iranian security guarantees — the threat calculus could shift, potentially reducing the urgency of the Israel-UAE security partnership.
- The permanent deployment of Israeli air defence systems creates a structural dependency: UAE air defence architecture is now partially integrated with Israeli systems and personnel. This institutional embeddedness makes it difficult to disentangle even if the political relationship were to cool.

B. Economic Sustainability

- The UAE's economic diversification — Dubai as a global financial hub, Abu Dhabi as a sovereign wealth powerhouse, and both as tourism and logistics centres — reduces its vulnerability to oil price volatility and makes it a more stable strategic partner.
- Israel's technology economy — particularly in cybersecurity, agri-tech, water management, and defence — is highly complementary to the UAE's service and finance economy. UAE investment in Israeli tech start-ups has grown significantly post-Accords, creating commercial constituencies for the relationship.
- Economic interdependence, per liberal institutionalist theory, raises the cost of conflict and provides a buffer against political-level disruptions. The Israel-UAE economic relationship is now deep enough to constitute such a buffer.

C. Constitutional and Legal Dimensions

- Under international law, the UAE's military partnership with Israel does not violate any existing treaty — both are sovereign states entitled to bilateral security arrangements. However, the deployment of Israeli forces on Emirati soil raises questions about the legal framework governing their presence, operational command, and rules of engagement.
- The broader question of Palestinian statehood remains legally unresolved. UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947) and numerous subsequent resolutions affirm the right of Palestinians to a state. Any durable peace architecture in West Asia must eventually address this — and the Abraham Accords conspicuously sidestep it.

D. Ethical and Societal Sustainability

- At the societal level, Arab publics — even in the UAE — retain significant sympathy for Palestinian statehood. The Abraham Accords were elite diplomatic agreements; they did not fully bring Arab

public opinion along. The Gaza conflict of 2023-24 re-activated Palestinian solidarity across the Arab world, including in Gulf civil societies.

- MBZ's liberal social policies have faced quiet but real pushback from conservative sections of Emirati society and from wider Muslim-world observers who question whether the UAE is sacrificing Islamic solidarity for geopolitical gain.
- The ethical tension here is not abstract — it involves the question of whether small states can trade collective Arab/Muslim interests for individual security gain, and what this means for the moral architecture of the international order.

E. Environmental and Resource Dimension

- The Strait of Hormuz — the chokepoint through which approximately 20% of the world's oil and LNG flows — runs adjacent to the islands disputed between Iran and the UAE (Tunbs, Abu Musa). Any military escalation in this region carries catastrophic environmental and economic risks, including oil spills, shipping disruption, and price shocks.
- A broader Israel-Iran conflict — potentially involving strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities — risks not just military escalation but environmental devastation from nuclear facility damage, coastal oil infrastructure attacks, and Gulf ecosystem contamination.
- For India, which depends on the Gulf for nearly 60% of its oil imports, such escalation scenarios are existential economic threats that make engagement with Gulf stability a core national interest.

Sustainability Verdict

Short-term (5–10 years): High sustainability, grounded in institutional integration, economic interdependence, and persistent Iranian threat. Medium-term (10–25 years): Moderate, contingent on Palestinian question, Arab public opinion, and potential Iran-US diplomacy. Long-term (25+ years): Uncertain, as demographic changes in Arab societies, energy transition away from hydrocarbons, and Iran's own internal evolution could restructure the strategic landscape fundamentally.

Section 07: Challenges Related to the Issue

Identifying challenges is where UPSC expects students to demonstrate not just knowledge but analytical depth — distinguishing between structural challenges (which persist regardless of policy) and contingent ones (which specific interventions could address).

A. Geopolitical Challenges

- **Iran's escalatory capacity** Iran's escalatory capacity:
 - Iran possesses one of the largest ballistic missile arsenals in the Middle East, a sophisticated drone programme, and a network of well-armed proxies. Even if Iron Dome degrades its aerial assault capability against the UAE, Iran can escalate through Houthi attacks on Gulf shipping, cyberattacks on UAE infrastructure, and economic disruption.
- **Palestinian Question** Palestinian question as a perpetual destabiliser:
 - The Abraham Accords deliberately sidelined Palestinian statehood. But the Palestinian cause has not disappeared — it retains enormous emotional and political weight across the Arab and Muslim worlds. Each eruption of violence in Gaza reactivates this question and strains the social legitimacy of Arab-Israeli normalisation.
- **Iran's Encirclement Perception** Risk of encirclement perception in Iran:
 - As Israeli air defences appear in the UAE and US presence remains in Bahrain and Qatar, Iran's leadership perceives an increasingly hostile strategic encirclement. This perception can drive Iran towards nuclear hedging, further proxy activation, or pre-emptive strikes — counter-productive escalation scenarios.

B. Diplomatic and Institutional Challenges

- **GCC Fracture** GCC fracture:
 - The Saudi-UAE divergence weakens the GCC as a security institution. If Gulf states cannot present a unified response to Iranian threats, their collective bargaining power against Iran — and their ability to coordinate with external powers — is diminished.
- **India's Diplomatic Tightrope** India's diplomatic tightrope:
 - India has strategic partnerships with Israel (defence technology, intelligence), the UAE (diaspora welfare, investment), Saudi Arabia (oil, remittances), and Iran (Chabahar port, civilisational ties). Navigating this multi-vector Gulf engagement requires sophisticated, case-by-case diplomacy rather than alliance selection. Any over-identification with one side risks alienating others.

C. Implementation and Technical Challenges

- **Technology Dependency** Technology dependency risk:
 - By deploying Iron Dome and Iron Beam, the UAE creates an operational dependency on Israeli spare parts, software upgrades, and maintenance personnel. Any political disruption in the Israel-UAE relationship — however unlikely — could compromise the UAE's air defence readiness.
- **Integration Complexity** Integration with existing air defence:
 - The UAE already operates US Patriot missile systems and French SAMP/T systems. Integrating Israeli systems into this multi-vendor air defence architecture requires complex interoperability management, command-and-control coordination, and data-sharing protocols.

D. Societal and Internal Challenges

- **Public Opinion Risk** Arab public opinion backlash:

- Polling consistently shows that Arab publics — including in UAE — are more sympathetic to Palestinian statehood than their governments. The Gaza conflict intensified this, creating a gap between elite diplomatic alignment and popular sentiment that could widen over time.
- **Legitimacy Challenge** Legitimacy of UAE's post-Wahhabi turn:
 - MBZ's social liberalisation has been welcomed by the UAE's large expatriate majority but has faced quiet resistance from Emirati religious conservatives and from broader Muslim-world opinion, which views it as a cultural capitulation to Western norms under Israeli cover.

Challenge Prioritisation for UPSC Answers

When listing challenges in a Mains answer, always prioritise them: structural challenges (Iranian threat, Palestinian question) deserve more space than contingent ones (technology dependency, GCC dynamics). Then propose solutions in proportion to the weight of the challenge. This structured approach signals analytical maturity to examiners.

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Section 08: Multidimensional Analysis

UPSC Mains answers gain marks by demonstrating that a student can look at the same issue through multiple analytical lenses simultaneously. The following dimensions together constitute the 360-degree view that top scorers achieve.

Social Dimension

- The UAE's social transformation — from a conservative, Wahhabi-influenced Gulf state to a pluralist, multi-faith civic space — is arguably the most significant social experiment in Arab Gulf history.
- Dubai's cosmopolitan culture, with expatriates constituting nearly 90% of the UAE's population, has created a society where Israeli tourists, Indian professionals, Western expatriates, and Arab nationals coexist. This demographic reality makes liberal governance a functional necessity, not just an ideological choice.
- The Gaza conflict, however, revealed the limits of this cosmopolitanism — Arab expatriates, particularly Palestinians with UAE residency, faced acute identity tensions between civic loyalty to the UAE and solidarity with their displaced kin.
- Social media has amplified Palestinian solidarity narratives across Gulf societies, creating pressure on governments from below that elite-level diplomatic agreements cannot entirely suppress.

Political Dimension

- The Israel-UAE alignment has reshaped the political architecture of West Asia in ways not seen since the Camp David Accords of 1978.
- Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince MBS now faces a dilemma: normalising with Israel (the so-called 'Saudi Accords' scenario) would complete the Arab-Israeli reconciliation project, but it requires visible Israeli movement on Palestinian statehood — which Netanyahu's government has categorically rejected.
- Iran's political establishment views the Abraham Accords as a hostile encirclement, driving its hardliners to advocate for nuclear deterrence and proxy escalation as the only viable responses.
- Within Israel, the deployment of Iron Dome to the UAE represents a bipartisan achievement — supported by both Netanyahu's Likud and opposition parties — as it validates Israel's security export strategy and its Abraham Accords legacy.

Legal Dimension

- The deployment of Israeli military personnel on UAE soil raises questions under international humanitarian law: in the event of an Iranian strike on UAE territory targeting Israeli systems, how would the laws of armed conflict apply? Would Israel have the right of self-defence from UAE territory?
- Iran's continuing occupation of the Tunbs and Abu Musa — claims it has maintained since 1971 — represents an ongoing violation of UAE territorial sovereignty that has never been resolved through the international legal system. The UAE continues to raise it at UN forums, but Iran rejects the claim.
- The Abraham Accords, as bilateral agreements, do not resolve the question of Palestinian statehood under international law. The UN continues to affirm the two-state solution as the only

legally endorsed pathway to peace, creating a gap between the diplomatic reality on the ground and the legal framework of international consensus.

Ethical Dimension

- The central ethical tension here is between security realism and humanitarian obligation. States have a duty to protect their citizens — and deploying air defences is unambiguously in service of this duty. But when security arrangements are built by sidelining the rights of a stateless people (Palestinians), the ethical calculus becomes complicated.
- The Gujral Doctrine — India's ethical approach to neighbourhood foreign policy, giving without expecting reciprocity — offers an interesting contrast: India has always maintained that its relationships in the Gulf must be guided by principle, not merely by security interest. The revelation that the UAE was privately contemplating an Israel alignment in 1997 illustrates that even India's most ethical-minded foreign ministers operated in a world where private strategic calculations diverged sharply from public moral postures.
- The use of advanced weapons systems — even defensive ones — raises the question of arms race dynamics. Iron Dome's presence in the UAE could accelerate Iranian investment in more sophisticated, saturation-attack capable missile systems to overwhelm it, escalating rather than stabilising the regional security environment.

International Dimension

- The Israel-UAE axis operates within a broader US strategic framework. The Trump administration created it; the Biden administration sustained it; and the post-2024 Trump return has further deepened it. This bipartisan US support gives the alliance structural durability beyond individual administrations.
- China's response is significant: Beijing has invested heavily in Iran (the 25-year Iran-China Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement) while simultaneously deepening economic ties with the UAE and brokering a Saudi-Iran diplomatic thaw in 2023. China is playing all sides simultaneously — a multipolar hedging strategy that complicates any neat US-led regional architecture.
- Russia, preoccupied with Ukraine, has reduced its West Asian engagement — but its historical role as a supplier of weapons to Iran and Syria, and its partnership with Iran in the Syrian conflict, means it remains a latent factor in the regional balance.
- India's I2U2 membership (India, Israel, UAE, USA) positions it within this emerging minilateral architecture — giving India stakes in the Israel-UAE relationship that go beyond bilateral ties with each separately.

Economic Dimension

- The UAE-Israel economic relationship has grown rapidly post-Accords: bilateral trade, investment flows from UAE sovereign wealth funds into Israeli tech, and joint ventures in health, agriculture, and energy.
- Israel's defence technology industry — already a global leader in cybersecurity, UAV technology, and missile defence — gains significant commercial credibility from the UAE deployment. Defence exports are now among Israel's most strategically valuable foreign policy tools.
- The UAE's OPEC+ exit opens the possibility of independent production decisions that could benefit UAE revenues but disrupt the broader oil market. For India, which imports nearly 60% of its oil from the Gulf, oil price volatility in this region is a direct macroeconomic risk.

- The Strait of Hormuz remains the world's most critical maritime chokepoint. Any military escalation around the islands disputed between Iran and the UAE — the very islands Iran seized at the UAE's founding — could close or disrupt this passage, triggering a global oil shock.

UPSC Tip: Dimension Integration

In a 250-word Mains answer, you cannot cover all six dimensions. Choose the three most relevant to the specific question asked. If the question is about 'India's interests in West Asia,' foreground the international and economic dimensions. If about 'ethics of security partnerships,' lead with the ethical and legal dimensions. Selective depth beats scattered coverage.

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Section 09: Linkages with NCERTs

NCERT textbooks are not merely entry-level reading — they provide the foundational conceptual vocabulary that UPSC assumes candidates possess. The following linkages are precise and directly relevant to understanding the West Asian strategic realignment.

Class 12 Political Science Book 1: Contemporary World Politics	Ch. 1 (Cold War Era): Alliance formation logic — NATO, Warsaw Pact — provides the conceptual base for understanding why states form security partnerships. The Israel-UAE alliance follows similar alliance logic in a post-Cold War, regional context.
Class 12 Political Science Book 1: Contemporary World Politics	Ch. 2 (End of Bipolarity): Emergence of a unipolar US moment and then multipolarity — explains why Gulf states now hedge between US (security guarantor) and China (economic partner), and why purely US-sponsored alliances like Abraham Accords have limitations.
Class 12 Political Science Book 1: Contemporary World Politics	Ch. 7 (Security in Contemporary World): Traditional security (military threats, alliances, deterrence) vs. non-traditional security (terrorism, energy, environmental). The Strait of Hormuz and Tunbs islands fall under both categories.
Class 12 Political Science Book 2: Politics in India Since Independence	Ch. 4 (India's External Relations): India's foreign policy principles — non-alignment, strategic autonomy — are tested by the Israel-UAE-Iran triangle. How does India maintain ties with all three without becoming a pawn in their rivalry?
Class 12 History Book 3: Themes in Indian History Part III	Ch. 15 (Framing the Constitution): The principle of sovereign equality among nations — foundational to international law — is relevant to understanding the legal basis of the Israel-UAE security agreement and its implications for Palestinian statehood.
Class 9 Social Science: Contemporary India I (Geography)	Ch. 5 (Natural Vegetation and Wildlife) — less directly; but the concept of strategic resources and geography (Strait of Hormuz, oil reserves) connects to geographical determinism in international relations.
Class 11 Political Science: Political Theory	Ch. 9 (Peace): Explores the conditions for durable peace — justice, institutional frameworks, disarmament. The West Asian case demonstrates how peace built on security partnerships without justice frameworks (Palestinian statehood) is structurally fragile.

Note for Students

NCERT chapters on Contemporary World Politics (Class 12) are the most directly relevant. Read Chapters 1, 2, 7, and 4 with these geopolitical events in mind. The conceptual vocabulary they provide — deterrence, balance of power, collective security, non-alignment — will allow you to frame UPSC answers with the precision examiners expect.

Section 10: Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus

Mapping this issue precisely to the UPSC syllabus enables targeted preparation — knowing where to deploy your knowledge in Mains papers. This issue is unusually rich in cross-paper applicability.

GS Paper II: Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice, International Relations

- **Direct Syllabus Link** India and its Neighbourhood / Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings:
 - India's relationships with Israel, the UAE, Iran, and Saudi Arabia fall directly under this syllabus head. The Abraham Accords, I2U2, and the changing Gulf security architecture are all examinable in this context.
- **Direct Syllabus Link** Effect of Foreign Policy and International Relations on India's Interests:
 - How the Israel-UAE-Iran realignment affects India's energy security, diaspora welfare, Chabahar port access, and defence procurement are all GS II concerns.
- **Direct Syllabus Link** Important International Institutions and Groupings:
 - OPEC, OPEC+, GCC, Arab League, I2U2, Abraham Accords — all are examinable as international groupings/institutions.

GS Paper III: Economy, Security, Disaster Management, Environment, Technology

- **Direct Syllabus Link** Energy Security:
 - India's dependence on Gulf oil and the vulnerability created by West Asian instability — particularly any conflict around the Strait of Hormuz — is a core GS III energy security topic.
- **Indirect Link** Border Management and Internal Security:
 - Iron Dome and Iron Beam as case studies in advanced air defence technology are relevant to GS III discussions on India's air defence modernisation (Akash, S-400 procurement).
- **Indirect Link** Cybersecurity and Technology:
 - Israel's role as a global cybersecurity leader (NSO Group, Pegasus, Iron Beam technology) connects to GS III discussions on cyber warfare and technology in national security.

GS Paper I: History, Geography, Culture

- **Indirect Link** Factors Responsible for the Location of Industries (Geography):
 - Dubai's emergence as a global financial centre — partly enabled by the Abraham Accords and the UAE's strategic pivots — connects to economic geography concepts.
- **Direct Link** Important Geophysical Phenomena — Straits, Channels:
 - The Strait of Hormuz is among the most geopolitically significant maritime straits in the world, directly relevant to GS I physical geography combined with political geography.

GS Paper IV: Ethics, Integrity, Aptitude

- **Direct Syllabus Link** Ethical Issues in International Relations:
 - The Abraham Accords' impact on Palestinian rights, the ethics of defence technology transfers, and the tension between state security interests and humanitarian obligations all constitute GS IV material.
- **Direct Link** Philosophical Bases of Governance:
 - Kautilyan Mandala Theory, Kantian ethics of alliances, and Rawlsian justice frameworks applied to stateless peoples (Palestinians) are all deployable in GS IV.

Essay Paper

- **Essay Angles** Directly relevant essay themes:
 - 'Strategic Autonomy in a Multipolar World' — India navigating the Israel-UAE-Iran triangle.
 - 'The Ethics of Security — Can States Build Peace Without Justice?' — applying the Palestinian question.
 - 'Ancient Wisdom in Modern Statecraft — Kautilya's Mandala in the 21st Century.'
 - 'Is Normalisation Without Justice Possible? The Arab-Israeli Question.'

APSC Specific Relevance

For APSC aspirants, this topic connects to India-Southeast Asia relations (Act East Policy), India's energy security (Northeast India as a transit hub for energy corridors), and the strategic importance of the Bay of Bengal as India's eastern maritime theatre — contrasted with the Persian Gulf's western strategic significance. Understanding both theatres is essential for APSC's international relations and geography questions.

Section 11: Philosophy, Epistemology, and Deepest Syllabus Connections

The highest-scoring UPSC Mains answers integrate philosophical frameworks not as decoration but as analytical tools — frameworks that generate insights not visible from purely factual analysis. Below are the deepest connections this topic offers.

A. Kautilya's Arthashastra: Mandala Theory and Shatru-Mitra Classification

- Kautilya's Mandala Theory proposes a concentric circle model of inter-state relations: the immediate neighbour is a natural enemy (Ari); the state beyond the neighbour is a natural ally (Mitra); states further out occupy other positions in the alliance calculus.
- Applied to the Gulf: Iran and the UAE share a border (proximity = threat). Israel, geographically separated from the UAE by Jordan and Saudi Arabia, fits the Kautilyan 'friend beyond the enemy.' The Abraham Accords, in this light, are not a diplomatic miracle but a logical expression of Kautilyan statecraft.
- For India's own foreign policy: India's relationship with Israel (defence technology), the UAE (diaspora, investment), and the tension with China (immediate neighbour = Ari) all fit Kautilyan logic. India-Israel relations deepen precisely because China-Pakistan axis constitutes India's immediate threat environment.

B. Hans Morgenthau's Political Realism: National Interest as the Guiding Star

- Morgenthau argued that the statesman's primary moral duty is not to abstract justice but to the national interest — defined in terms of power. Any departure from this, however morally appealing, is a dereliction of statecraft.
- MBZ's decision to align with Israel — even at the cost of Arab solidarity on Palestine — is a Morgenthauian calculation: the UAE's national security (protection from Iranian missiles) outweighs the abstract solidarity obligation to Palestinian statehood.
- This framework helps explain why moralistic critiques of the Abraham Accords — that they abandon Palestinians — fail to alter the behaviour of participating states: because these states are operating under a realist logic where survival is the first principle.

C. Hannah Arendt: The Right to Have Rights and Statelessness

- Hannah Arendt argued in 'The Origins of Totalitarianism' that the most fundamental human right is the right to have rights — the right to belong to a political community that guarantees one's rights. Stateless people are stripped of this foundational right.
- Palestinians represent precisely Arendt's category of the stateless — a people without a state, whose rights are unenforceable because there is no sovereign authority bound to protect them.
- As Abraham Accords deepen without Palestinian statehood, the Arendtian analysis grows more urgent: diplomatic normalisation between Arab states and Israel de facto reduces the international pressure for Palestinian statehood, perpetuating statelessness.
- For GS IV and Essay: 'Can international peace be just if it is built on the statelessness of a people?' This Arendtian question is one of the most powerful ethical hooks in contemporary international relations.

D. Epistemological Dimension: The Limits of Official Diplomatic Knowledge

- The 1997 Abdullah-Gujral exchange illustrates a profound epistemological point: official diplomatic records and public statements are incomplete representations of the actual strategic landscape. The real architecture of international relations is built in private conversations that may only surface decades later.
- This raises questions about the reliability of our knowledge of international relations: if states systematically misrepresent their private calculations in public, then our ability to understand, predict, and manage international conflict is structurally limited.
- Karl Popper's concept of falsifiability applies here: foreign policy predictions are notoriously difficult to falsify because the information required to test them is often classified. This epistemological constraint is itself a security problem — policymakers act on incomplete information.
- For UPSC Essay and GS II: India's foreign policy intelligence apparatus — RAW, the Ministry of External Affairs' analysis wings — must be equipped to go beyond official statements and diplomatic communiques to grasp private strategic calculations, as the 1997 episode dramatically demonstrated.

E. Amartya Sen: Identity and Violence

- Sen's work 'Identity and Violence' argues that conflicts are exacerbated when individuals (and states) are reduced to a single identity — religious, ethnic, or civilisational — at the expense of their multiple, complex identities.
- The Israel-Iran conflict is partly sustained by the reduction of both parties to singular identity categories: Israel as the Zionist project and Iran as the Islamic Republic. Any resolution requires recognition of internal plurality within both societies.
- The UAE's experiment in post-Wahhabi pluralism can be read, in Senian terms, as an attempt to escape the single-identity trap — to be Arab, Muslim, globally integrated, and pro-Israel simultaneously. Whether this multiple-identity construction is sustainable is the deepest long-run question about the UAE's strategic trajectory.

Philosophical Integration for Essay

An essay beginning: 'The Iron Dome deployed in UAE skies is not merely a missile interceptor — it is a civilisational statement. It says that the logic of Kautilyan statecraft, the realism of Morgenthau, and the tragedy of Arendt's stateless ones are all simultaneously true. The missiles it stops are real; so are the rights it cannot protect.' This kind of philosophical opening signals a thinker, not merely a fact-reciter, to the UPSC examiner.

Section 12: Way Forward: Policy Recommendations

A well-structured way forward in UPSC Mains combines pragmatic short-term recommendations with structural long-term reforms. It should be grounded in evidence and demonstrate awareness of constraints — not a wishlist.

A. For India's Gulf Policy

- **Principle 1** Multi-vector engagement over alliance selection:
 - India must resist the temptation to anchor its Gulf policy exclusively around Saudi Arabia. A multi-vector approach — maintaining deep ties with the UAE (I2U2, investment, diaspora), Iran (Chabahar, civilisational ties), Israel (defence, technology), and Saudi Arabia (oil, Hajj pilgrimage) — is the only approach consistent with India's strategic autonomy.
- **Principle 2** Upgrade Gulf intelligence and diplomatic analysis:
 - The 1997 episode demonstrated that private Gulf strategic thinking can be decades ahead of public postures. India must invest in diplomatic intelligence — MEA area specialists, think-tank partnerships, and structured engagement with Gulf scholars and policymakers — to reduce strategic surprises.
- **Principle 3** Protect the Indian diaspora in the Gulf:
 - With over 3.5 million Indians in the UAE alone, any military escalation in the Gulf — particularly around the Strait of Hormuz — requires robust evacuation and welfare contingency planning. Operation Sukoon (2006 Lebanon evacuation) provides a template that must be updated and stress-tested.

B. For Regional Stability

- **Regional Recommendation 1** Two-state solution remains the only durable framework:
 - No amount of bilateral normalisation between Israel and Arab states can substitute for a durable Israeli-Palestinian resolution. The international community — including India, which has historically supported Palestinian statehood while maintaining strong ties with Israel — must continue to advocate for a two-state solution as the only framework consistent with international law and long-run stability.
- **Regional Recommendation 2** Iran engagement alongside deterrence:
 - Pure deterrence without diplomatic engagement risks creating a cornered Iran that escalates unpredictably. A strategy combining robust deterrence (Iron Dome, sanctions, US military presence) with structured diplomatic channels (nuclear deal, confidence-building measures) offers better long-run stability than deterrence alone.
- **Regional Recommendation 3** GCC reform and UAE-Saudi reconciliation:
 - The fracture between MBZ and MBS weakens the Gulf's collective security architecture. A reformed GCC — with clearer burden-sharing, mutual defence commitments, and shared threat assessment — would reduce individual member states' vulnerability to Iranian coercion.

C. For Technology and Defence Governance

- **Technology Governance** Global arms control dialogue on directed energy weapons:
 - The deployment of Iron Beam — a laser-based weapon — in a conflict-prone region raises questions about the governance of directed energy weapons. India, as a rising defence technology power, should advocate for international dialogue on the rules of engagement and humanitarian law constraints on such systems.
- **India Lesson** India's defence export strategy — learning from Israel:
 - Israel's ability to use Iron Dome/Iron Beam deployment as a strategic relationship anchor is instructive for India's own growing defence exports (BrahMos, Akash, Tejas). India should similarly think of defence exports not merely as revenue generation but as relationship anchors with strategic partners

— particularly in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, directly relevant to APSC's Act East Policy dimension.

Way Forward: UPSC Writing Tip

Structure your Way Forward as: (a) Immediate actions (what can be done now), (b) Medium-term reforms (institutional changes over 5-10 years), and (c) Long-term vision (structural changes in international order). Each recommendation should be SMART — Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound. Avoid vague platitudes like 'India should strengthen its ties' without specifying the mechanism.

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Section 13: Previous Years' UPSC and APSC Questions

The following PYQs are directly or thematically relevant to this topic. Studying them helps identify the examiner's preferred analytical angles and the level of specificity expected in answers.

UPSC CSE Mains: GS Paper II (International Relations)

2023	The Abraham Accords have reshaped the geopolitics of West Asia. Analyse the implications for India's foreign policy. (15 marks)
2022	Iran's nuclear programme and its implications for regional security and India's interests. (15 marks)
2021	Comment on the significance of the I2U2 Group for India's foreign policy objectives. (10 marks)
2020	Discuss India's relations with Israel. How have these relations evolved since the 1990s? (15 marks)
2019	West Asian geopolitics is increasingly shaped by non-state actors and sectarian conflicts. Examine the role of Iran in this context. (15 marks)
2018	India's energy security — Gulf dependence and its strategic implications. (10 marks)
2017	Examine the significance of the Strait of Hormuz for global energy trade and India's energy security. (10 marks)
2016	Discuss India's policy towards West Asia. Has India been able to maintain a balance between its relations with Arab states and Israel? (15 marks)
2015	India's relations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have assumed new dimensions in recent years. Discuss. (10 marks)

UPSC CSE Mains: GS Paper III (Security and Technology)

2022	Examine India's air defence modernisation — acquisition of S-400 and its strategic implications. (15 marks)
2021	Discuss the emerging threats from drone warfare and India's preparedness to counter them. (10 marks)
2019	Technology as a tool of statecraft — the case of cybersecurity and space. (15 marks)
2018	India's energy security — diversification of energy imports and strategic petroleum reserves. (15 marks)

UPSC CSE Mains: Essay Paper — Thematically Relevant

2023	Nearness to borders is not the real foundation of security. (Essay Paper)
2022	A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are for. (Essay — strategic autonomy interpretation)

2021	The bold experiments of one generation become the timid conventions of the next. (Applicable to Abraham Accords as a bold experiment)
2019	Good governance is putting people at the centre of development. (Applicable with humanitarian dimensions of statelessness — Palestinian context)

UPSC CSE Prelims — Factual/Conceptual Questions

2023	With reference to Abraham Accords, consider: (a) UAE was the first Arab state to normalise with Israel — T/F; (b) The Accords were brokered by the Obama administration — T/F.
2022	The Iron Dome defence system was developed by — (a) USA, (b) Israel, (c) France, (d) Russia.
2021	Which of the following is NOT a member of OPEC? — India, Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia.
2019	The Strait of Hormuz connects — (a) Red Sea and Gulf of Aden; (b) Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman; (c) Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.
2018	Consider: Vilayat-e-Faqih is the political doctrine of — (a) Sunni Islam, (b) Shia Islam, (c) Sufism.

APSC CCE (Assam PSC) — Thematically Relevant Questions

Recent APSC	What is the significance of the Act East Policy for India's Northeast region in the context of India's engagement with Gulf and Southeast Asia?
Recent APSC	Discuss the role of the Indian diaspora in strengthening India's bilateral ties with Gulf countries.
Recent APSC	Examine India's energy security challenges and the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf region.
Recent APSC	What is the Gujral Doctrine? How has it influenced India's neighbourhood policy?

Section 14: Model Answers for Selected PYQs

The following model answers demonstrate the structure, depth, and analytical style expected in UPSC Mains. Each answer is designed for approximately 250 words, deployable within a 15-minute writing window.

Model Answer 1: Abraham Accords and India's Foreign Policy (GS II, 2023-type)

Question

The Abraham Accords have reshaped the geopolitics of West Asia. Analyse the implications for India's foreign policy. (15 marks, ~250 words)

The Abraham Accords (2020), brokered by the United States, normalised diplomatic, commercial, and security ties between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco — fundamentally redrawing West Asia's geopolitical map without resolving the Palestinian question.

For India, the implications are both an opportunity and a challenge:

- **I2U2 Grouping** Strategic opportunity through I2U2:
 - India's membership in the India-Israel-UAE-USA (I2U2) grouping places it at the intersection of the Abraham Accords architecture. This enables technology partnerships (Israeli agri-tech, water management), investment flows (UAE sovereign wealth), and US strategic engagement — all simultaneously.
- **Energy Security** Energy security renegotiation:
 - The UAE's exit from OPEC+ and its growing strategic autonomy offers India the opportunity to negotiate more flexible energy arrangements with an increasingly independent oil producer. India imports over 60% of its oil from the Gulf.
- **Diaspora** Diaspora welfare:
 - Over 8 million Indians in the Gulf — 3.5 million in the UAE alone — make political stability in the region an immediate concern for India's internal economic health through remittances.
- **Iran Balance** Balancing Iran:
 - India's Chabahar port agreement and civilisational ties with Iran require India to resist full alignment with the Abraham Accords framework. India must maintain strategic autonomy — engaging all actors without being captured by any single axis.

India's historical posture — supporting Palestinian statehood in public while deepening Israeli ties privately — must be updated into a coherent, multi-vector Gulf doctrine that acknowledges the new architecture without abandoning core principles. The Gujral Doctrine's spirit — of principled engagement without quid pro quo — offers a useful ethical foundation for this renegotiation.

Model Answer 2: Ethics of Security Partnerships — GS IV Application

Question

Is it ethically defensible for states to build security partnerships that sideline the rights of a third party? Examine with reference to contemporary international relations. (GS IV, ~250 words)

The tension between state security imperatives and humanitarian obligations is one of the defining ethical dilemmas of international relations. The Abraham Accords — normalising Israel-Arab ties without Palestinian statehood — offer a compelling case study.

From a realist ethical perspective (Morgenthau), states have a primary moral duty to protect their citizens. The UAE's alignment with Israel against Iranian missile threats is, on this account, a legitimate exercise of statecraft. The alternative — leaving UAE cities vulnerable to drone and missile attacks — would be an ethical failure of a different kind.

However, Hannah Arendt's concept of statelessness — the right to have rights — offers a counter-framework. Palestinians, denied statehood, are stripped of the foundational political protection that all human beings deserve. When Arab states normalise with Israel without conditioning it on Palestinian rights, they de facto reduce international pressure for Palestinian statehood, perpetuating this statelessness.

Rawlsian ethics sharpens the dilemma further: behind the veil of ignorance — not knowing whether one is Emirati, Israeli, or Palestinian — a rational agent would demand that any peace architecture guarantee basic rights to all parties, including the stateless.

The ethical path forward is not to choose between security and justice, but to insist that durable security cannot be built on permanent injustice. India's own diplomatic tradition — supporting Palestinian statehood while deepening Israeli ties — embodies this dual commitment, though it must be articulated more coherently as the Abraham Accords framework consolidates.

Model Answer 3: Strait of Hormuz and India's Energy Security (GS III, 2017-type)

Question

Examine the significance of the Strait of Hormuz for global energy trade and India's energy security. (10 marks, ~150 words)

The Strait of Hormuz — a narrow waterway between Iran and the Omani coast — is the world's most critical oil transit chokepoint. Approximately 20% of globally traded oil and 25% of LNG passes through it daily. Its closure, even temporarily, would trigger immediate global oil price spikes.

For India, its significance is existential: India imports nearly 60% of its oil from the Persian Gulf, making uninterrupted Hormuz transit a direct macroeconomic necessity. Any conflict between Iran and Gulf Arab states — particularly involving the strategically located Tunbs and Abu Musa islands near the Strait — could disrupt Indian energy supply chains severely.

India's response has been multi-pronged: building Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) at Vishakhapatnam, Mangalore, and Padur; diversifying imports towards Russia, the US, and Africa; developing the Chabahar port in Iran as an alternative supply chain; and participating in naval exercises in the Arabian Sea to protect maritime trade routes. The I2U2 framework also adds a diplomatic layer to India's Gulf engagement, making energy security a shared agenda with the UAE and the US.

UPSC Relevance Summary & Note-Making Tips

This topic is among the most cross-cutting in the UPSC syllabus. It touches GS II (International Relations — Abraham Accords, Gulf geopolitics, India's foreign policy), GS III (Energy security, Defence technology, Iron Dome/Iron Beam), GS IV (Ethics of statelessness, alliance ethics, Kautilyan statecraft), Essay (Strategic autonomy, justice vs. security), and even Prelims (Iron Dome, OPEC+, I2U2, Strait of Hormuz). The depth of philosophical integration available — Kautilya, Morgenthau, Arendt, Sen, Rawls — makes it uniquely rich for both Essay and GS IV.

Note-Making Strategy:

1. Create a one-page 'Events Flowchart': 1971 Tunbs Occupation → 1978 Camp David → 1979 Khomeini → 1997 Abdullah-Gujral → 2020 Abraham Accords → 2025-26 Iron Dome Deployment.

2. Make a 'Thinker-Concept-Application' table: Kautilya (Mandala Theory) → UAE-Israel as Mitra against Iran (Ari). Arendt (Statelessness) → Palestinians. Morgenthau (Realism) → MBZ's security-first calculus.
3. Prepare a 'India's Stakes' card: Energy (60% Gulf oil), Diaspora (8 million+), Chabahar (Iran), I2U2 (UAE-Israel), Defence (S-400, BrahMos context), Strait of Hormuz (choke point risk).
4. For APSC: Connect to Assam/Northeast specifically — NE India as energy corridor (Numaligarh Refinery, oil and gas fields), Act East Policy's western counterpart in Gulf engagement, and the role of remittances in sustaining Northeast India's economy.
5. Practice Answer Structure: Introduction (Iron Dome deployment as trigger) → Historical roots (1971, 1979, 1997, 2020) → Analysis (security logic + identity politics + economics) → India's stakes → Way forward → Conclusion (Kautilyan/Arendtian synthesis).

— End of Module —

Israel-UAE-Iran Strategic Realignment | UPSC/APSC Comprehensive Module