

# Expert Explains: What 2026 Delhi Declaration tells about India's approach to the Middle East

The comprehensive joint statement released after the India-Arab League meeting clarified their positions on a number of issues — and kept silent on others

Written by: [Bashir Ali Abbas](#) 7 min read New Delhi Feb 3, 2026 06:00 AM IST



External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar with Arab leaders in New Delhi. (Image source: X/DrSJaishankar)

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India hosted 22 members of the League of Arab States (AL) for the second India-Arab Foreign Ministers Meeting, 10 years after the first iteration in Bahrain.

This meeting occurred amid escalating tensions between Iran and the US, a growing rift between Saudi Arabia and UAE, and the US President [Donald Trump](#)-led Board of Peace attempting a new approach to resolving the Israel-Palestine question.

India has stakes in all three situations. In the days before the meeting, India hosted the UAE's Mohammed bin Zayed for an unprecedented three-hour trip to New [Delhi](#) as Abu Dhabi's ties with Riyadh grew particularly strained, India's Deputy National Security Advisor visited Tehran to meet senior Iranian leaders amid a US troop build-up around the country, and India's Ministry of External Affairs reaffirmed India-Palestine ties as the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs arrived in New Delhi on January 29.

In a joint statement — the Delhi Declaration — after the meeting, India and the Arab League clarified their positions on a number of issues, apart from commitments to enhance cooperation.

### The many conflicts in the region

The Delhi Declaration uniformly focuses on the need to uphold the “sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity” of Sudan, Somalia and Libya, and “rejects interference” in their internal affairs.

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All three nations have been central to the growing rift between two camps in the Middle East — one led by Saudi Arabia as the principal power supported by most of the Arab League, and one led by the UAE and Israel, and supported by the US.

Formally, these camps do not exist — especially as the UAE remains a crucial constituent of the League (co-chairing the January 31 meeting). The lines of division, however, are evident on the ground in each of these states, as reflected by the measures each side has taken.

The UAE is accused of supporting the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan, a militia that has waged war against the Sudanese government (since 2023), established a parallel government (in April 2025), and brutalised civilians in city after city.

The case is similar in Libya, where the UAE has long supported the breakaway Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar, which is opposed to the internationally recognised

government in Tripoli. While other AL states such as Saudi Arabia have engaged with the LNA, the bulk of their efforts is towards reconciliation between conflicting factions.

In the case of Somalia, Israel is the only UN member-state to recognise the Republic of Somaliland — a breakaway quasi-state within Somalia. The UAE began recognising Somaliland passports in 2025, a position contrary to other AL states.

While India was quick to rebuff any possibility of recognising Somaliland last December, it took a categorical position along with the rest of the Arab League in reiterating its support for the internationally recognised governments in Libya and Sudan on January 31. The Delhi Declaration's condemnation for atrocities against civilians in particular is in line with this position.

In Yemen (which has been the principal site of the conflict between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh), India and the AL explicitly condemned Houthi attacks on navigation in the Red Sea. This is a subtle break from India's policy of condemning Houthi actions without explicitly naming the group in the last two years, as the Houthis linked their actions with Israel's war in Gaza. India was more vocal in condemning the Houthis prior to 2023, when the group attacked Emirati and Saudi oil infrastructure.

More importantly, the Declaration's support for Yemen's unity is in line with the Saudi position that Riyadh militarily enforced in December/January by acting against the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council, a secessionist faction in South Yemen.

Last, the Declaration is relatively quiet on Syria, restricting itself to an appreciation of Damascus's counter-terror efforts against the Islamic State. In any case, Indian engagement with post-Assad Syria, led by the formerly Al Qaeda-affiliated Ahmed al-Sharaa, has been "bureaucratic-ministerial" (read cautious). Indian diplomats met Syria's foreign minister in July 2025, while Syrian diplomats met India's External Affairs Minister at the January 31 New Delhi meeting.

### **On principal conflicts**

The Delhi Declaration makes no mention of the Donald Trump-led Board of Peace (BoP). While key Gulf states are now BoP members, India is yet to accept the invitation extended in January.

Notably, the Delhi Declaration features support for the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. This is a land-for peace arrangement where Arab states recognise Israel in exchange for Israeli

recognition of a Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders.

While the Declaration also supports the 2025 Sharm el-Sheikh summit's outcomes (which also features the only mention of America's role), the reference to the Arab Peace Initiative signals the actual preferences of both India and the Arab League.

These states support Trump's efforts to end the violence in Gaza, but avoid encouraging the new logic that the US President's plan comprises for the larger Israel-Palestine question. Both India and the Arab League support Palestinian sovereignty.

Finally, the Declaration avoids mentioning the principal conflict that threatens fresh regional instability — the US military build-up around Iran and the prospect of a larger war. This is arguably to respect bilateral approaches.

Key Arab League states, led by Saudi Arabia, are making efforts to discourage US military action against Iran. India's Deputy National Security Advisor meetings in Tehran (especially with Iran's Supreme National Security Council chief, Ali Larijani) indicate India's need to keep Iran engaged, especially as New Delhi takes measures to protect the relationship from US sanctions.

Notably, India's 2026-27 [budget](#) bears no allocation for the Chabahar Port despite India's 10-year agreement in 2024 to operate the port — a reflection of vulnerability to US sanctions.

### On the region and Indian diplomacy

Ultimately, the Delhi Declaration furthers India-Arab League cooperation on the five key pillars identified at the inception of the meeting as the highest institutional dialogue mechanism between India and the Arab League in 2002 — economy, energy, education, media and culture. The Declaration looks to further such cooperation on the back of “robust trade between India and Arab States that is over US\$240 billion”.

But more importantly, it cements India's approach to the Middle East and the Gulf. New Delhi has strong partnerships across geopolitical lines, but these relationships are transactional and siloed from India's positions on broader issues. On regional geopolitics, India prefers long-standing normative positions to preserve stability without any encouragement of disruption caused by particular states.

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