



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**INDIA AND GULF: FROM PASSIVE
BENEFICIARY TO SECURITY
PROVIDER**

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INDIA AND GULF: FROM PASSIVE BENEFICIARY TO SECURITY PROVIDER

Context

- The growing influence of external powers and hostile regional pacts directly threatens India's trade routes, energy security, and the welfare of millions of Indian citizens living in the Gulf.

About Gulf/West Asia

- West Asia is central to India's **energy security, trade, diaspora welfare and maritime connectivity**.
- The Gulf is a major economic partner, while the wider region links the Indian Ocean with Europe through the **Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Aden, Bab-el-Mandeb and Red Sea**.

West Asia vs Gulf	
West Asia	Gulf
Broad geographical region	Sub-region within West Asia
Iran, Israel, Türkiye, Arab states, etc.	Mainly the six GCC states i.e. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman

India's stakes are in West Asia / Gulf therefore multidimensional:

- Energy:** West Asia remains a major source of India's crude oil and gas.
- Diaspora:** Millions of Indians work across the Gulf, making their safety and employment strategically important.
- Remittances:** Gulf employment is a major source of foreign-exchange inflows.
- Trade & connectivity:** The region is a crucial gateway for India–Europe commerce and emerging corridors such as IMEC.
- Strategic geography:** Disruptions in Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb or the Red Sea can rapidly affect Indian shipping and supply chains.

India–West Asia Relations

- Strategic Distance & Hedging:** For decades, India largely viewed West Asia through an **economic and diaspora-centric lens**.
 - It maintained relations with competing countries i.e. **Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel and the UAE** without becoming part of any regional security bloc.
 - This approach, now described as **multi-alignment**, offered considerable flexibility.
 - India could simultaneously obtain energy, access Gulf capital, protect its diaspora and maintain relations with Iran and Israel.
- From Economics to Strategic Engagement:** India's engagement has already deepened through defence cooperation, intelligence exchanges, maritime exercises, counter-terrorism cooperation and strategic partnerships with **UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Oman and other regional states**.
 - However, the **regional environment is changing** faster than India's traditional diplomatic mechanisms.
 - A perceived US shift towards **selective engagement** has encouraged West Asian states to seek alternative and more dependable security partners.
 - The **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement** involving Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan combines **Saudi financial resources, Turkish defence capabilities and Pakistani military expertise**, signalling that new security architectures can emerge without Indian participation.

Why Is India's Approach Under Pressure?

- **Changing US Role:** Greater uncertainty over Washington's long-term security commitments is creating a regional security vacuum.
- **Rise of hard-power diplomacy:** Gulf states increasingly seek defence technology, intelligence, naval capabilities and counter-terrorism cooperation, not merely economic partnerships.
- **Regional conflicts:** Iran, Yemen, Sudan, the Red Sea and wider Gulf tensions have interconnected security consequences.
- **Infrastructure vulnerability:** Drone and grey-zone attacks demonstrate that sophisticated ports, energy installations and logistics hubs remain vulnerable despite heavy investment.
- **Fragile trade corridors:** Maritime chokepoints and overland corridors are only as resilient as their most unstable geographical link.
- **Competitive regional powers:** Türkiye, Pakistan and other external actors are expanding their strategic footprints.

India's Vulnerabilities

- **Energy Security:** Disruptions around the **Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman** can affect India's energy supplies and prices.
- **Maritime and Trade Security:** The **Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Bab-el-Mandeb** are critical to global commerce.
 - ♦ Disruption in these narrow maritime passages can delay shipping, increase insurance costs and undermine supply chains.
- **Diaspora Security:** Millions of Indians live and work in Gulf countries. Regional instability therefore has direct implications for **Indian citizens, remittances and evacuation operations**.
- **Connectivity:** Projects such as the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** depend on political and physical stability across West Asia.
 - ♦ Recent disruptions to Red Sea shipping demonstrate that sophisticated ports and logistics infrastructure remain vulnerable to asymmetric threats such as drones and missiles.

Way Forward: From Beneficiary to Security Provider

- India should evolve from a **passive beneficiary of regional stability into an active contributor to it**, without abandoning strategic autonomy.
- **Strengthen Maritime Security:** Expand naval cooperation across the **Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, Somali coast and Bab-el-Mandeb** through joint patrols, logistics access and interoperable surveillance.
- **Build Minilateral Security Networks:** Deepen operational partnerships with **UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel and other willing states**, while avoiding rigid alliance commitments.
- **Leverage Defence Manufacturing:** Offer India as a reliable supplier of defence platforms, surveillance systems and maritime technologies, alongside joint production and exercises.
- **Expand Intelligence & Counter-terrorism Cooperation:** Institutionalised intelligence-sharing can address terrorism, drones, piracy and other grey-zone threats.
- **Protect Connectivity:** Integrate **IMEC and other trade corridors** with maritime-security planning so that economic connectivity is backed by strategic resilience.

Conclusion

- India's **multi-alignment remains valuable**, but it cannot substitute for security capabilities in an increasingly contested West Asia.
- The objective should not be alliance entanglement, but a **deterrence web based on maritime power, defence cooperation, intelligence and strategic partnerships**.
- For India, becoming a credible security provider is increasingly essential to safeguarding its **energy arteries, trade routes, diaspora and wider aspiration to emerge as a leading global power**.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Examine the need for India to transition from a passive beneficiary to a credible security provider in the Gulf amid emerging regional security challenges.

Source: TH

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