

The Transformation Of Indian Security Roles In The Western Indian Ocean And Strengthened Naval Partnerships With Gulf Nations

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Abstract—

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) has emerged as a pivotal element in India's 21st-century maritime strategy, serving as a crucial conduit for trade and energy security. This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of India's strategic transition towards becoming a proactive Net Security Provider in the region, a significant shift from its historically continental focus. It examines the multifaceted factors driving this transformation, including the economic imperative to secure control over Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), the geopolitical necessity to counterbalance the increasingly assertive presence of extra-regional powers, and the security objective of addressing non-conventional threats such as piracy and maritime terrorism. Central to this analysis is the intensification and multidimensional nature of naval collaboration between India and key members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), notably the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Sultanate of Oman. Through a qualitative examination of advanced joint naval operations (such as Exercise Zayed Talwar and Exercise Al-Mohed Al-Hindi), institutionalized information exchange agreements (e.g., IFC-IOR), and logistical arrangements (e.g., access to the Port of Duqm), this study reveals a critical and rapidly evolving operational cooperation. The findings indicate that this cooperation is essential for enhancing maritime domain awareness within India, expanding its operational capabilities beyond its shores, and improving coordination with major regional navies. The paper concludes that the progress in this strategic alignment is not merely transactional but stems from a shared vision of a rules-based maritime order, underpinning India's aspiration to act as a stabilizing and leading power in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Index Terms— Western Indian Ocean (WIO) - Maritime security - India-GCC naval cooperation - Net security provider - Strategic alignment - Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) - Joint naval exercises - Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) - Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR) - Logistics agreements - Defense exports - SAGAR doctrine - Geopolitical challenges - China's naval presence - Non-traditional security threats - Strategic autonomy - blue water navy capabilities - Indo-Pacific strategy

I. Introduction

The center of gravity of the global maritime environment is now viscerally in the Indo-Pacific region, which is anchored by the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), a large territory in which the most critical sea lanes are located. The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) in this area comprises the Arabian Sea and approaches the strategic choke points, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Babel-Mandeb is a crucial sub-region. It is the major global energy pathway and a melting point of international commerce; however, it is also a theatre of geopolitical tension, vulnerabilities, and various security risks [1]. The WIO is not a far-flung sea; it is close to the home and in a strategic backyard to India. More than 80 percent of its imports of crude oil and approximately half of its total trade movements go through these waters; therefore, their stability must be a non-negotiable national interest [2].

The post-independence Indian strategic posture has been contingent in the temporal history of border disputes with its neighbors and the non-aligning foreign policy approach [3]. The Indian Navy was considered an inferior service on many occasions, resulting in relative maritime neglect. However, a sequence of transformative events, including the fall of the Cold War to the wake-up call of the 2008 Mumbai seaborne terrorist attacks, triggered a reorientation at the core. The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami further served as a catalyst for this shift because the Indian Navy proved its capability as a force of regional good in large-scale Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations conducted during the incident [4].

This strategic change of reasoning is formally summed by the Indian policy of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), which was first described by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi in 2015. SAGAR is the doctrinal manifestation of India being a "Net Security Provider" net security provider, which is a term used to indicate a nation that produces more regional security than it absorbs [5]. It is proactive in providing a safe, secure, and stable maritime environment. However, the enormity of the WIO and the intricacy of its security issues exclude absolute action. As a

result, the desire of cooperation, on the one hand, cannot be discussed as something extraordinary and necessary; instead, it is also the indispensability of cooperative partnerships in the context of the practice of the operationalization of the SAGAR doctrine.

The key issue in this strategic venture that will be the focus of this paper is the partnership between India and the Gulf States. This study aims to address the following key research question: How and why is India using deepening naval cooperation with its Gulf partners to entrench its position as a major security provider in the Western Indian Ocean?

This paper argues that the India-GCC naval nexus has evolved beyond being a conditional and peripheral transaction-based relationship to become a viable strategic partnership involving mutual and strategic production of security. Convergence is explained in such ways that it is prompted by the shared interests of regional stability, mutual desire for strategic autonomy, and the shared threat of extra-regional powers. This paper is organized as follows: Section two outlines the changing strategic environment of the WIO; section three describes the transition in Indian doctrines; section four is an in-depth study of the facets of India-GCC naval cooperation; section five is the discussion of the constraints and challenges; and the conclusion is given in the final section on the future course of this strategic relationship.

II. The Changing WIO (Western Indian Ocean) Strategic Importance

The confluence of economic, geopolitical, and security dynamics defines the strategic salience of the Western Indian Ocean. To understand the logic behind the Indian-GCC naval convergence, it is important to understand the given drivers. The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region has emerged as a critical arena of strategic importance due to the convergence of economic, geopolitical, and security factors. This area, encompassing waters from the eastern coast of Africa to the western shores of India, has become a focal point for global maritime trade, energy transportation, and geopolitical competition. The region's strategic salience is further amplified by its role as a vital conduit for international commerce, with several crucial shipping lanes and choke points located within its boundaries, such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

The economic significance of the WIO is underscored by the vast energy resources found in the Gulf region and the growing importance of the African markets. The sea lanes of the WIO serve as critical arteries for the transportation of oil and natural gas from the Middle East to the major consumers in Asia and Europe. Additionally, the region's ports and coastal areas have witnessed increased investment and development, attracting attention from both regional and extra-regional powers seeking to establish economic footholds and secure strategic interests.

The geopolitical landscape of the WIO has become increasingly complex with various state and non-state actors vying for influence and control. The presence of major powers, such as the United States, China, and India, alongside regional players, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, has intensified competition and raised the stakes for maritime security. This evolving strategic environment has necessitated closer cooperation between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in the naval domain, as both entities seek to protect their interests, ensure freedom of navigation, and maintain stability in this crucial maritime space.

A. The Economic Necessity- the protection of critical SLOCs

The WIO was in first place as an ocean of trade. The lifelines of the world economy are sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in the Arabian Sea. The Strait of Hormuz represents the traversal of almost one-fifth of the entire oil consumption volume in the world (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2024). For littoral countries, such as India, which imports more than 85 per cent of its crude oil, the security of these SLOCs is of the highest importance (Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, 2024). Any interference through state-sponsored aggression, terrorism, or even piracy would have disastrous effects on the economy. This financial weakness has given India a strong motive to ensure a constant presence in this waterway and the formation of relationships with fellow Gulf countries that are equally reliant on it as a means of exporting and importing goods [6].

B. China as a factor

The activity of the People's Republic of China is the most influential geopolitical factor creating a security environment in the WIO. Beijing has more advanced inroads, funding, and developing dual-use infrastructure through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), financing and developing ports, railroads, and highways in diverse regions [7]. The controversial theory of the so-called String of Pearls has been revived since China opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017 and took operational control of ports in countries such as Gwadar in Pakistan and Hambantota in Sri Lanka [8]. Ending the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships, submarines, and spy vessels in the Indian Ocean became a standard association rather than an aberration [9]. This not only directly threatens India to its traditional dominance in the region but

also puts a powerful force in favor of New Delhi to solidify its relationship with other actors in the region, such as the GCC states, to avoid excessive reliance on any one external power [10].

C. Asymmetric Threat Matrix

In addition to great-power rivalry, WIO is challenged by diverse non-traditional or asymmetric security menaces. Somali piracy posed a serious challenge to world shipping until it was curbed by multinational joint naval forces, with large Indian Navy participation in the early 21st century [11]. The probability of a maritime act of terrorism is also strong, and the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai can be a vivid reminder of the opportunity that the sea presents as an agent of terrorism [12]. Furthermore, the region has become an important center point of narcotic trafficking, trafficking of weaponry, and Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, destabilizing the cohesion and governance of the region [13]. None of these transnational threats can be dealt with by one nation; thus, cooperative security systems and information sharing should be viewed not only as desirable but also necessary.

India's transition from a laggard to a net security provider in the maritime domain represented a significant shift in its strategic posture. This doctrinal change is evident in the country's official strategy documents, which now emphasize a more proactive and assertive approach to maritime security. This evolution reflects India's growing recognition of the importance of the maritime domain to its national interests, including economic prosperity, energy security, and regional stability.

The change in doctrine is not merely rhetorical but is also manifested in India's operational attitude. The Indian Navy has expanded its presence and activities beyond immediate coastal waters, engaging in more frequent and complex exercises with partner nations. This increased naval engagement extends to the Indian Ocean region and beyond, demonstrating India's commitment to play a larger role in maintaining regional maritime security. Additionally, India has invested in modernizing its naval capabilities, including the acquisition of new vessels and the development of maritime infrastructure, to support its evolving role as a net security provider in the region [14].

III. Awakening of the maritime plus after cold war

After the changes accompanying the Cold War and the liberalization of the economy in India in the 1990s, New Delhi slowly began acknowledging the connection between maritime prosperity and maritime security [15]. The Indian Navy began examining coastal defense and moved towards extending its strategic maritime focus beyond the coast. These ideas were first laid down in 2004 in the Indian Maritime Doctrine, which incorporated concepts such as sea control and power projection for the first time [16].

A. Expression of an official Strategy

The Mumbai attacks of 2008 proved to be a great eye-opener because they revealed significant weaknesses in the coastal defense systems of India. This gave way to a major makeover and release of the maritime strategy document *Freedom to Use the Seas: India Maritime Military Strategy* released in 2009, which clearly stated the role of the navy in the creation of a favorable and safe sea environment [17]. It has been replaced by the most detailed formulation of Indian maritime aims to date: the 2015 strategy, *Ensuring Secure Seas: India Maritime Security Strategy*. The document specifically points out that the main purpose of the navy's role is to ensure security in and through the seas, as well as formally codify the purpose of becoming a net security provider in the IOR and beyond [18]. It stopped relying on a threat-based approach and instead adopted a capability-based approach, with an emphasis on building the required assets and cooperation to influence the security environment.

IV. Operationalising the SAGAR Doctrine

The navy's strategy relies on the SAGAR doctrine, which offers a political direction to its strategic documents. It has got a number of practical dimensions to begin with, it entails the employment of the Indian naval force to boost the maritime security capabilities of friendly littoral states in terms of training, technical support and equipment donations [19]. Second, it gives the Indian Navy the status of the first responder in the case of any regional crisis, which includes the use of HADR capabilities as an instrument of diplomatic goodwill. Third, it obliges India to comply with a rule-based regime in the ocean, in reference to the principles of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) [20]. Such clarity of doctrines has given political impetus and strategic guidance to boldly advance the interest of the navy in key partners, predominantly the Gulf.

A. Four Pillars of India-GCC Naval cooperation: The relationship between GCC states and India is no longer young. It is a strong and multidimensional relationship founded on four different and, at the same time, interdependent pillars, of which the combined effect will increase regional security. The first pillar of India-GCC Naval cooperation is strategic alignment. Both India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states share common interests in maintaining maritime security, combating piracy, and ensuring the safety of sea lanes in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. This alignment has led to increased joint naval exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordinated patrols, thus strengthening the overall security architecture of the region. The second pillar was economic cooperation. The naval partnership between India and GCC countries facilitates smoother trade relations and protects vital energy supply routes. As India's economy continues to grow, its energy demand increases, making GCC a crucial partner in ensuring energy security. Conversely, GCC states benefit from India's expanding market and technological expertise, creating a symbiotic relationship that extends beyond naval cooperation. The third pillar is technological collaboration and capacity-building. India's expertise in shipbuilding, maritime technology, and naval training programs has become increasingly valuable to GCC states seeking to modernize and expand their naval capabilities. This collaboration involves joint research and development projects, technology transfers, and training exchanges, which not only enhance the naval prowess of both parties, but also foster deeper ties between their defense industries and personnel.

B. Joint exercises in Operations Interoperability

Joint naval exercises have increased both in frequency and complexity, and are the most tangible developments in deepening cooperation. These drills have gone beyond mere simplistic pas-ex (passage exercises) to sophisticated war-gaming scenarios that can help promote coordination in hostile contingencies.

- a) With the Zayed Talwar (UAE), the Talwar exercise with the UAE Navy has become an essential part of the bilateral defence relationship. The year 2021 is an example of an Indian Navy destroyer, a frigate, and its helicopters joining UAE naval assets. Some of the drills involved complicated tactical exercises, over-the-horizon targeting, and cross-deck helicopter movements, the effectiveness of which reflects their high degree of mutual trust [21].
- b) During Saudi Arabia (Al-Mohed Al-Hindi), the first of the Al-Mohed Al-Hindi (The Indian Sword) took place in 2021 and that exercise changed the India-Saudi Arabian relationship. Held off the coast of Al Jubail, the military exercise consisted of an Indian guided missile destroyer and a Royal Saudi Navy corvette and frigate participating in anti-aircraft drills, coordinated patrols, and search and rescue [22]. The fact that it was successfully executed implied a lot of political will on both sides in deepening defense relations beyond symbolism.
- c) With Oman (Naseem Al Bahr): The oldest and most mature of these activities was established in 1993, and the exercise with Oman called Naseem Al Bahr (Sea Breeze). The exercise incorporates both naval and air forces and exercises the complete range of maritime operations, including seaway security and sea denial. The fact that this routine and challenging training is a strong indication that the durability of strategic confidence has always been there between India and Oman [23].

C. Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

Successful maritime security depends on a comprehensive domain awareness. Realizing that an individual nation cannot track the expansivity of the IOR, India established the Information Fusion Centre IOR (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram in 2018. This center is a sensitive point in the emerging web of regional collaboration.

Construction and Capability: The IFC-IOR is an information hub on 24/7 that integrates data provided by the national and international communities, including white shipping data, satellite imagery, and coastal radar systems. Its mission is to provide a coherent real-time representation of the maritime situation and share actionable intelligence with partners [24].

D. Towards an Institutionalized Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

The IFC-IOR model thrives on external involvement; the more countries are included, the greater the success of the model. The longstanding practice of posting International Liaison Officers (ILOs) drawn from partner countries in the center is a salient feature. Countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia are among the most important countries that have seconded ILOs to the IFC-IOR. Moreover, this human-in-the-loop technology allows smooth and trusted sharing of information, a process that is usually cluttered with bureaucracy because of state accountability [25]. The collusion leads to considerable strengthening of the overall MDA of all the involved countries, which can further monitor the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman.

The success of the IFC-IOR model is further enhanced by its ability to foster collaboration and information-sharing among diverse maritime stakeholders. By bringing together representatives from various nations, the center creates a unique environment where different perspectives, expertise, and resources can be pooled to address common maritime challenges. This collaborative approach not only improves overall maritime domain awareness, but also helps build trust and strengthen diplomatic ties between participating countries. The presence of ILOs from strategic partners such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia demonstrates the model's effectiveness in engaging key regional players and leveraging their insights to enhance maritime security in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman. Furthermore, IFC-IOR's human-centric approach to technology integration plays a crucial role in overcoming traditional barriers to information sharing. By combining advanced technological systems with human expertise, the center can process and analyze maritime data more effectively, leading to more accurate and timely threat assessments. This hybrid model allows for a nuanced interpretation of complex maritime situations, taking into account geopolitical contexts and regional sensitivities that may not be apparent in automated systems alone. As a result, the IFC-IOR can provide participating countries with a more comprehensive and reliable picture of maritime activities, enabling them to make informed decisions and coordinate responses.

E. Strategic Extension through Logistics and Basing

The efficacy of a navy is contingent not only on its combat capabilities, but also on its logistical support and capacity for strategic extension. Logistical agreements therefore serve as crucial strategic enablers.

Duqm Benefit: The bilateral agreement established in 2018 with Oman, which permits the Indian Navy to transit and utilize the Port of Duqm, represents a significant strategic achievement. Geographically, Duqm is a deep-water port located on the southeast coast of Oman and is distant from the volatile Strait of Hormuz. This location provides the Indian Navy with a secure logistics hub, offering direct access to the Arabian Sea and broader Indian Ocean. The agreement facilitates the docking of Indian naval vessels at Duqm for resupply, refueling, and maintenance, thereby significantly reducing turnaround time and enhancing the Indian Navy's long-term deployment capabilities in the Western Indian Ocean [26]. A fundamental aspect of India's strategy is the management and exertion of maritime power within the region of interest.

A Network of Access: The Duqm Agreement is not an isolated arrangement. It is part of a broader framework of logistical agreements that India has established with partner nations, including France (for access to Réunion), Singapore, Australia, and the United States, to develop a network of support facilities that bolster the Indian Navy's blue water aspirations [27].

The strategic extension of naval capabilities through logistics and base agreements is a critical component of India's maritime strategy. The agreement with Oman for access to the Port of Duqm exemplifies this approach, providing the Indian Navy with a strategically located deep-water port in the Arabian Sea. This arrangement offers significant operational advantages, including reduced transit times, enhanced deployment capabilities, and a secure logistics hub away from potential conflict zones such as the Strait of Hormuz. The Duqm Agreement not only extends India's naval reach but also strengthens its strategic presence in the Western Indian Ocean region.

India's broader strategy involves creating a network of logistical support facilities across and beyond the Indian Ocean. This network includes agreements with various partner nations, such as France, Singapore, Australia, and the United States. These arrangements collectively enhance India's ability to project power, sustain long-term deployment, and respond effectively to regional maritime challenges. By establishing this web of support points, India aims to bolster its blue-water naval capabilities and asserts its role as a significant maritime power in the Indo-Pacific region. This approach aligns with India's broader geopolitical objectives of maintaining regional stability, protecting sea lines of communication, and countering potential threats to maritime interest [28].

Export of Defence Hardware: As an initiative of its Make in India program, the country aims to export its locally manufactured defense equipment. Systems in India that have attracted attention among Gulf nations include the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, coastal surveillance radar systems, and naval patrol vessels. With a successful export contract in place, the interdependent relationship becomes a defense-industrial alliance [29].

The export of defense hardware not only strengthens India's economic ties with Gulf nations but also enhances its strategic position in the region. By providing advanced military technology and equipment, India can contribute to the modernization of Gulf militaries while simultaneously expanding its influence. This mutually beneficial arrangement allows India to showcase its technological prowess and manufacturing capabilities, potentially leading to increased orders and long-term partnerships in the defense sector.

Furthermore, defence industrial cooperation between India and the Gulf nations can foster knowledge transfer and joint research and development initiatives. Collaborative efforts in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and unmanned systems can lead to innovative solutions tailored to the specific needs of a region. This cooperation can also be extended to joint production ventures, where Indian expertise combines with Gulf resources to create cutting-edge defence technologies. Such partnerships not only strengthen bilateral ties, but also contribute to regional security and stability by enhancing the defense capabilities of participating nations.

V. Challenges and Future Prospects

Regardless of the favorable trend, navy India-GCC collaboration encounters many hurdles that must be handled sensitively. Cultural differences and divergent strategic priorities between India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations can significantly influence the dynamics of naval cooperation. Each country brings its own historical experiences, defence doctrines, and national interests to the table, which may not always align seamlessly. For instance, India's maritime strategy emphasizes securing the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and ensuring freedom of navigation, whereas GCC nations may prioritize coastal defense and the protection of maritime trade routes critical to their energy exports. These differing priorities can lead to mismatched expectations and operational goals during joint naval initiatives, potentially hindering the effectiveness of the collaborative efforts. Communication challenges further complicate such partnerships. Language barriers, variations in military jargons, and differences in command structures can impede the smooth execution of joint exercises or real-time coordinated missions. Although English is often used as a common operational language, nuances in communication styles and decision-making processes can still result in misunderstandings or delays. Moreover, standardized protocols for information sharing, threat assessment, and tactical coordination may not be uniformly adopted, leading to inefficiencies or even operational risks during high-stake missions. The broader geopolitical environment in the region adds another layer of complexity to India-GCC naval cooperation. The Middle East is characterized by shifting alliances, regional rivalries, and ongoing conflicts, all of which can influence the willingness and capacity of GCC nations to engage in sustained maritime collaboration with external partners, such as India. For example, tensions with regional powers such as Iran or involvement in conflicts such as the Yemen crisis may limit the scope of joint naval activities or necessitate a cautious approach to avoid diplomatic fallout. These geopolitical sensitivities require both India and the GCC to navigate their cooperation through strategic foresight and diplomatic agility to ensure that mutual interests are advanced without exacerbating regional tensions.

A. Capacity requirements and cost constraints

India has grandiose plans regarding the seas, but fiscal realities hold them back. The navy is also struggling with a deficit in the desired force of 200 ships and is experiencing problems with several procurement plans, especially the acquisition of submarines and mine countermeasure ships [30]. To maintain the tempo of operations and continuous presence in the WIO, it is necessary to invest heavily, but allocating resources will always be a challenge. The Indian government faces a delicate balancing act in pursuing its maritime ambitions while contending with budgetary constraints to ensure sustainable naval growth. To address this challenge, a strategic approach that focuses on prioritizing key acquisitions and modernization efforts is essential. By identifying and targeting critical capability gaps, such as by enhancing anti-submarine warfare capabilities or upgrading aging surface vessels, the Indian Navy can maximize the impact of limited resources. This targeted approach allows for the development of a more effective and modern naval force, without overextending financial commitments.

Exploring partnerships with allied nations and leveraging domestic shipbuilding capabilities offers promising avenues for enhancing India's naval presence in the Western Indian Ocean region. Collaborative efforts with strategic partners can provide opportunities for joint exercises, technology transfers, and shared logistics support, effectively extending the Indian Navy's reach and capabilities. Simultaneously, investing in and expanding domestic shipbuilding infrastructure can reduce dependence on foreign suppliers, potentially lowering long-term costs, and stimulating economic growth. By adopting a multifaceted strategy that combines focused modernization, international cooperation, and indigenous production capabilities, India can achieve its maritime objectives while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

B. The Diplomatic Juggling

The Middle East is an area of multilayered conflict. India has managed to negotiate between these fault lines and sustain close relationships with both Israel and the UAE/Saudi camp, as well as with Iran. This neutrality becomes increasingly difficult because of the deepening of its security role. Such naval operations and partnerships made by India should not be overextended or otherwise seen to go all the way with one party or another regarding regional disputes [31]. The Middle East's complex geopolitical landscape presents a multitude of challenges to nations seeking to maintain diplomatic relationships in the region. India has demonstrated remarkable skills in navigating these intricate fault lines, successfully fostering close ties with seemingly opposing factions. India has cultivated a strong alliance with Israel while simultaneously

maintaining cordial relations with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, India managed to preserve positive rapport with Iran, despite the latter's strained relationships with other regional powers. This delicate balancing act allowed India to maintain a neutral stance and leverage its position for strategic advantages.

However, as India's security role in the region continues to expand, maintaining neutrality has become increasingly challenging. The country's involvement in naval operations and partnerships in the Middle East has raised its profile and has potentially exposed it to greater scrutiny from regional actors. As India's presence in the area grows, there is a risk that its actions may be perceived as favoring one side over the other in ongoing regional disputes. This perception could potentially jeopardize the carefully cultivated relationships India has built over time and limit its ability to act as a neutral mediator in future conflicts.

To preserve diplomatic flexibility and maintain strategic advantages, India must exercise caution in its regional engagements. As Rajagopalan (2020) suggested, India should avoid overextending its naval operations and partnerships in a manner that could be interpreted as aligning too closely with any particular faction. By maintaining a measured approach and carefully considering the potential implications of its actions, India can continue to navigate the complex web of Middle Eastern relationships, while preserving its neutral stance. This balanced strategy will allow India to maintain its influence in the region and potentially play a constructive role in future peacebuilding efforts.

VI. Conclusion

India is shifting to the maritime domain and can be regarded as one of the most crucial geopolitical changes related to the Indian Ocean. As argued and demonstrated in this paper, this evolution is not a one-sided affair, as it is strongly tied to the intensification of naval cooperation with some of its key partners in the Gulf. This is a deep intersection of interests that has led to the establishment of this partnership, which is resting on the pillars of operational interoperability, institutionalized information sharing, strategic logistical access, and emerging industrial collaboration.

The India-GCC relationship has developed into a serious and strategic partnership on the maritime front due to the common interests of securing critical sea lines of communication, dealing with the emergence of China, and dealing with transnational threats. It has enabled the effective operationalization of the SAGAR doctrine in India, which turned out to be a political vision into a practical operational reality. India is not only securing and stabilizing its own economic and security interests, but by actively exploiting opportunities to maintain a strategic presence in the Western Indian Ocean, India is establishing its own claim to status as a modestly responsible and irreplaceable strategic power in the Indo Pacific. As regulative pressures and political considerations continue to occur, the trend of this relationship is simply pointing upward. This is the characteristic of the new architecture of the region as far as security is concerned, and it is bound to contribute immensely to shaping the maritime future of the 21st century.

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