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REALIGNING THE 'LOOK WEST' POLICY:

India's Strategic
Balancing Act in
Post-Conflict
West Asia

AUTHORED BY:

Ashu Mehlawat



"The disruptions to fuel, fertilizer, and food supply chains caused by the crisis in West Asia will continue to have a significant impact on the Global South for some time. If we are truly committed to strengthening international solidarity, the most vulnerable countries should not be left to bear the burden of these crises alone."

– Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing the G7 Summit Outreach Session, France (June 17, 2026)

West Asia has moved from the scene of acute military hostilities to a delicate, fragile post-conflict period. India has been engaged with this region for decades, based on its foundational 2005 "Look West" policy. Traditionally, this approach allowed New Delhi to maintain its relations with regional adversaries, mainly Israel, Iran and the Arab Gulf monarchies, in separate, non-communicating compartments.

Lately, however, this dynamic has been permanently altered by regional escalations and the structural damage they have caused. The old paradigm of passive multi-alignment is no longer adequate. With the region in the throes of a slow and contested stabilization process, India is actively reorienting its "Look West" policy. The shift is from quiet neutrality to an active, finely calibrated strategic balancing act to protect economic interests and ensure an expanding geopolitical footprint.

The Resilience of India's Economic Fundamentals

In the last fiscal year, India's trade architecture has displayed significant macroeconomic resilience despite maritime blockades, shipping of volatile chokepoints and regional instability. India's overall exports hit an all-time high of \$863 billion during the Financial Year 2025-26, official data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said. But this macro success hides severe undercurrents of stress in the West Asian corridor itself. The impact of the conflict put heavy pressure on bilateral trade at the local level. Merchandise exports to West Asia fell 28% year-on-year to \$4.16 billion in April 2026, the Ministry of Commerce said in April 2026. Exports to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has traditionally been among India's top trading partners, contracted temporarily by 36.4% to \$2.2 billion in the same month.

India's import side merchandise inflows from the region fell 31.6% to \$10.5 billion. The fall due to supply disruptions, and India's deliberate tactical diversification into other markets.

TRAVELLING THE VOLATILE GEOPOLITICAL AXIS: ISRAEL AND IRAN

The true litmus test of India's reoriented policy is its "differentiated engagement" with the two main opposing powers in the region: Israel and Iran. New Delhi does not take sides but manages its relations with both capitals on the basis of particular national interests, which are not contradictory.



The Israel Axis

Cooperation with Tel Aviv remains very operational and structured. Or beyond existing defence dependencies. Current bilateral efforts are beyond military and high-yield. There was no need for public political alignment to keep the strategic partnership active, as joint initiatives in precision agriculture, water management technology, and digital innovation ecosystems have continued uninterrupted throughout the crisis.

The Iran Axis

Simultaneously, India has retained its strategic space with Tehran. India Ports Global Limited has signed a historic 10-year formal contract with Iran's Ports and Maritime Organisation to develop and operate the strategic Chabahar Port, marking a major milestone on May 13, 2024. Official records from Rajya Sabha show that the port has handled more than 450 ships, 134,082 TEUs of container cargo and over 8.7 million tonnes of bulk cargo since its inception. Chabahar, for New Delhi, remains a vital sovereign gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), giving access to Central Asia and Russia, bypassing overland blockades.

Reviving Connectivity: The Future of IMEC

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) lies at the heart of India's long-term economic integration with West Asia. IMEC was first introduced during the G20 New Delhi Summit in 2023. It was intended to be a revolutionary, multimodal transport network that would connect South Asia to Europe through the Levant and the Arab Gulf.

The recent regional violence put a temporary halt to its development, but the post-conflict era has given the corridor a fresh diplomatic focus. Global research organisations like the Atlantic Council's geopolitical modelling and projections demonstrate the enormous economic possibilities behind this project:

Indicator	Projected Strategic Impact
Transit Time Reduction	~40% faster than traditional Suez Canal maritime routes (saves 12+ days)
Logistics Cost Savings	~30% reduction for India-Europe cargo trade
Global Trade Efficiency	~USD 5.4 billion saved annually on Asia-Europe trade flows
Medium-term Indian GDP Boost	~USD 11.9 billion expansion

To counter infrastructure gaps and the lack of a centralized coordinating agency, India is using its diplomatic capital to advocate for an "International Mobilisation Partnership for Accelerating Connectivity and Trade" (IMPACT). This proposed framework seeks to combine G7 capital with Indian technical talent and local regional ownership. This strategy aims to build resilient, high-speed freight rail lines (designed to run at 120 km/h) and subsea fiber-optic data cables across the Gulf, cementing India's role as a primary logistical hub for the Global South.

Securing the Maritime Commons

The vulnerabilities exposed by non-state actor interventions and missile exchanges in vital maritime chokepoints—such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab-el-Mandeb—have forced India to add a strong security component to its "Look West" doctrine.

To transition from "calculated silence" to operational security, policy analysts have called for the institutionalization of a permanent, inter-ministerial Maritime Contingency Task Force. This mechanism would bridge operational leaders from the Indian Navy, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, and the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.



In times of increased regional tension, the protocol is intended to automatically start Indian naval escorts for commercial vessels. Importantly, the policy incorporates state-underwritten sovereign maritime insurance guarantees to maintain economic viability in the event that commercial insurers retreat. This guarantees that India's vital commercial routes and energy inputs are totally shielded from external geopolitical upheavals.

Conclusion

In post-conflict West Asia, India's revised "Look West" policy demonstrates that strategic autonomy does not equate to passive neutrality or diplomatic isolation. Rather, it is a multi-alignment technique that is active and practical. New Delhi has successfully safeguarded its fundamental economic interests by establishing the institutional framework for IMEC, fortifying its tight defence and capital links with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and managing its ties with Israel and Iran as independent alliances. India's balanced strategy acts as a stabiliser for its own economy and a trustworthy diplomatic link across a shattered international environment as the region constructs its new post-conflict status quo.

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