

Maritime dimension of Modi's foreign policy: Indo-Gulf maritime cooperation and its implications for Pakistan

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Abstract:

Owing to its geostrategic significance, the Indian Ocean is central to global maritime competition. Aimed at establishing its dominance over the Indian Ocean, India is an important player in this global power struggle. The current paper focuses on a crucial sub-region of the Indian Ocean, i.e., the Persian Gulf. Indian maritime security strategy (2015) mentioned the region as central to its interests. The study aims to uncover the maritime dimension of PM Modi's foreign policy, the strategic significance of the Persian Gulf region for India, and the enhanced maritime Indo-Gulf interaction since Modi took office in 2014. A significant focus of the research is to analyse the possible implications of enriched Indo-Gulf maritime cooperation for Pakistan's foreign and defence policies. For probing the issue, a qualitative research method has been utilised. Primary sources included official documents and reports by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Defence of the Indian government. Books, newspapers, and research articles were consulted as secondary data. The Paper concludes that the gradual increase in the maritime interaction between India and Gulf states is seriously challenging Pakistan's historical standing in the area. Pakistan needs to pursue a proactive strategy for securing its interests.

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1. Introduction

The Indian Ocean is the first thing that clicks to mind when one thinks about the maritime security of India. It is the third largest ocean in the world and is home to strategically located choke points like the ‘Strait of Hormuz’ and ‘Strait of Malacca’. These choke points are the busiest trading routes, connecting energy-rich regions of the world with energy-deficient regions (Kumar, n. d.). India, with a coastline of 7500km and EEZ of more than 2 million km, is the largest state in the Indian Ocean. The fact that it has 13 major, and more than 200 smaller ports demonstrates its maritime potential. Sea-based commerce accounts for 90% of its volume and 77% of its value-added trade (Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015).

Persian Gulf lies southwest of India and is its crucial maritime neighbour. Regional states are rich in hydrocarbons and are strategically located near-global maritime traffic routes. Gulf supplies most of India’s oil needs and hosts a large Indian diaspora. Thus, forgoing intimate and cordial relations with these states is central to the Indian national interest of securing a dominant position in the Indian Ocean Region. Considering all these aspects, expansion in the maritime domain (especially in the Persian Gulf) became a pivotal pillar of Indian foreign policy. Indian Strategists, since independence, have long eluded Indian policymakers to maintain a tight grip on the Indian Ocean by establishing forward bases in different strategically located islands of the ocean (Panikkar, 1971). However, due to its preoccupation with China and Pakistan, India’s strategic mindset for a long time remained land centric. In 2001, India released its first-ever maritime doctrine, and its maritime strategy was drafted in 2007, which was later revised in 2009. Despite these developments, subsequent Indian governments hardly paid attention to the development of naval capabilities. The tide turned for good when PM Modi commenced the Maritime Security Strategy in 2015 and decided to actively pursue its vision of incredible India by controlling the waters of the Indian Ocean (Hassan, 2019). The current paper aims to understand the objectives of Indian Maritime Security Strategy (specifically in the Persian Gulf). And the significance of Persian Gulf for the maritime interests of India. Paper is concerned with the question: How can increased Indo-Gulf cooperation impact Pakistan’s standing in the region?

K.V. Pannikar, through his writings in 1944 and 1945 highlighted the importance of Indian Ocean for the economic and commercial security of India. Rahul Chaudhury (2000) in his book, has aptly described attitude and policies of Indian governments towards ‘sea power’ since 1947. Ladwig (2019) discussed different factors like deterring external powers from dominating Indian Ocean (IO), protection of SLCs, and its aspirations of global hegemony, which are pressurizing India for modernization and expansion of its naval capabilities. David Scott (2006) explained the concept of ‘extended neighbourhood’ in India’s foreign policy orientation. The writer elaborated on different regions (including Persian Gulf) which can be part of India’s extended neighbour. Anas (2021) comprehensively accounts for Indian policy towards West Asia. Writer explained the historical evolution of these relations and excellently elaborated on the acceleration of Indo-West Asian relations under the leadership of Modi.

Apart from these, Middle Eastern Institute India's books provided detailed account of growing economic, political and security cooperation between India and Gulf. Laraib Farhat (2021) explains expanding political, economic, investment and defence Indo-Gulf ties. She also deliberated on the possible implications of these relations for Pakistan.

Most of the available literature is in the perspective of general policies and bilateral interstate relations (between India and Gulf countries) with particular reference to Indo-Pak rivalry dominating the scene. Some researchers also talk about Modi's proactive foreign policies specifically towards the maritime neighbours. The conducted research does not take into account a holistic picture of the maritime dimension of Modi's foreign policy towards the Persian Gulf region. Therefore this paper aims at finding out a big picture of Modi's maritime policies and the resultant enhancement of India-Gulf maritime interaction and impact on Pakistan's interests in Persian Gulf region.

This paper has four major sections. First part discusses the maritime dimension of Modi's foreign policy. Second part sheds light into the strategic importance of Persian Gulf for India. Third part explains India's maritime relations with different countries of Gulf region. Fourth part is related to the implications of Indo-Gulf maritime ties for Pakistan's security and defence policies.

2. Theoretical framework

Maritime dimension of Indian foreign policy and Indo-Gulf emerging ties is analyzed within the framework of offensive realism, a sub-division of structural realism. It postulates: the anarchic nature of international system presses states towards the maximization of power. States use to maximize their power in order to ensure their survival. Offensive realism equates survivability with eliminating all sources of threat and power projection. Mearschiemer stated, "Desire for more and more power does not go away unless a state achieves the ultimate goal of hegemony" (p. 18). He further describes two forms of hegemony: Global and Regional. Global hegemon establishes its dominance in the international system while regional hegemon dominates specific region. States striving for global hegemony start their journey by dominating their respective regions. Afterwards it moves towards a nearby region (Mearschiemer, 2001, pp. 50-51).

Pakistan is the only South Asian state that challenges Indian aspirations of regional dominance. But for the last few years regional balance of power has tilted in Indian favour. On the other hand, via Maritime Security Strategy and the subsequent tactical moves, Indian government is increasing its influence in the whole Indian Ocean region. For offensive realists, states can cooperate on the principle of relative gains. It means that even in a win-win situation, states will be worried about maximization of their profit (Mearschiemer, 2001, p. 60). Gulf region, for long, remained dependent on external powers for defence assistance. Historically America remained a major contributor to Gulf security, but due to the Chinese rise, America is now

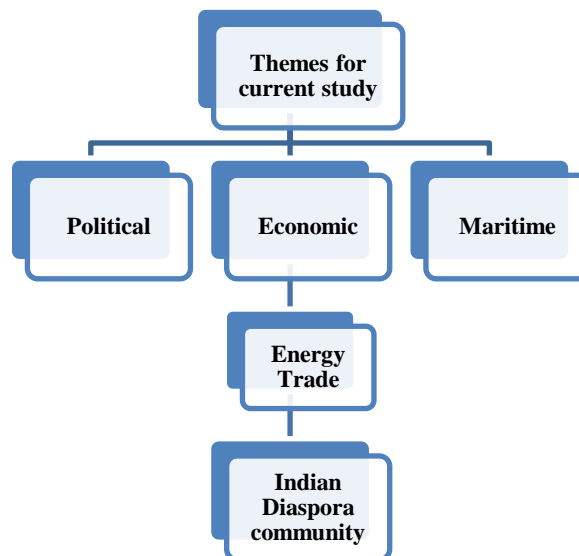
more concerned in Asia Pacific than Persian Gulf. This dependence is reinforced by the fact that oil rich Gulf countries are heading towards economic diversification and India is a huge market. This mutual dependence between India and the Gulf has reinforced their maritime ties. This increased interaction can negatively impact Pakistan's standing in the region. The situation created a security dilemma in the policy circles of Pakistan.

3. Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted to systematically analyze different events and available trade data. Most of the work is based on secondary sources including books, research articles, magazines, newspaper articles and internet sources, etc. Primary sources for the current study remained limited to the reports of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Defence of India and Indian Maritime security strategy (2015).

3.1. Thematic analysis

To develop understanding and quality output for the present research problem data is analyzed through the technique of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is method of identifying important themes or patterns within data and to analyze these themes for addressing research questions. Main themes for the current research are mentioned in the following diagram.



3.2. Operationalization

3.2.1. Political interaction:

It is operationalized as high-level political exchanges and the subsequent agreements, MOUs etc.

3.2.2. Economic relations:

The economic relations are operationalized as energy trade and diaspora community (remittances).

3.2.3. Maritime Interaction:

Maritime interaction is operationalized as naval interaction, training, port calls, joint naval exercises, and joint patrolling etc.

Both secondary and primary data were analyzed under the above-mentioned themes. On bases on this analysis conclusions were drawn.

4. Modi and the Maritime Aspect of National Power

Being aware of shifting world politics and India's future as a stable and developing economy, Indian PM Narendra Modi soon after accession, convinced his administration to reorient Indian foreign policy with a focus on the maritime aspect. He maintained that India could achieve great power status through refurbishing naval muscle and greater control over the Indian Ocean. So, his administration sketched out a vision for a more significant role of India in international waters (Lou, 2019). Such extensive engagements require India to be a maritime power. Usually, maritime power is synonymous with naval might, but naval clout is just one aspect of maritime power. The Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan mentioned some essentials of a maritime power which include: the development of naval forces, development of ports and harbours, development of mercantile marine, coastguards, shipbuilding industries, repair facilities, marine resources, and focus on research and development (Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, 2018; Waseem & Sajjad, 2022). The following portion will elaborate Indian Maritime Security Strategy presented during Modi's first tenure.

4.1. India's Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS) 2015

Generally, the terms strategy and policy are used interchangeably, but technically they are not synonymous. A policy could be defined as a standard for the intended action, whereas strategy provides a layout for the execution of action described in the state's policies (Karen, 2011). Along similar lines, military strategy and grand strategy are two different aspects of strategic manoeuvrings. Grand strategy is the mobilization of all national power (military, economic, and diplomatic) in support of national objectives, as opposed to military strategy, which exclusively uses armed forces. The desired objectives on international seas are the focus of the maritime strategy, a sub-domain of a country's grand strategy. In addition to the role played by the Indian Naval Forces, the national maritime strategy is developed after careful consideration, planning and understanding of the existing political, economic, and marine restrictions (Hattendorf, 2013).

In 2015, Indian Navy released its new maritime security strategy aimed at reconstructing and purgation of its naval forces and capabilities. Indian Naval Chief, Dhowan, considered sea power as the vital element for Indian revival at the global level. He described the twenty-first century as the century of seas for India. So is stressing the need for developing a sophisticated naval might (Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015). IMSS highlighted maritime threats faced by India. Traditional maritime threats include:

- a) States with strategic military capabilities and hostile intents towards India (especially China and Pakistan)
- b) Regional tensions and rising insecurities in the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Aden and their littorals
- c) Presence of major powers in Indian Ocean Region (Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015 p 32).

Major non-traditional maritime threats to India are:

- a) Maritime terrorism (both from the sea or at sea)
- b) Piracy and armed robbery at sea
- c) Trafficking and smuggling (Human, drug and arms)
- d) Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU)
- e) Proliferation of private armed security services
- f) The Climate change and natural disaster (Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015, p. 42).

Among such a wide range of traditional and non-traditional threats, IMSS also explains Indian maritime interests in the Indian Ocean Region. These include Protecting India's sovereignty and territorial integrity against threats from the Maritime environment, safety and security of sea-borne trade, energy routes and resources in the maritime domain, and ensuring security and stability in the Indian maritime zones, maritime neighbours and areas of maritime interests, safety, security, and wellbeing of Indian Diaspora. To deter conflict and coercion against India, early termination of maritime military operations on Indian terms and conditions, to protect Indian coastal and offshore assets against threats from the sea or at sea, creating a favourable environment for enhancing net security in Indian areas of maritime interests and Maritime power projection via projecting India as a net security provider (Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015, pp. 9-10).

Apart from mentioning these objectives and threats, IMSS also elaborated on primary and secondary areas of maritime interest of India. The point to ponder is that 'The Persian Gulf and The Strait of Hormuz ' are mentioned as primary areas for Indian maritime interests in IMSS (Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015). It implies that the threats and objectives listed above directly relate to the Gulf area. The following section will probe the significance of these regions for India.

4.2. Strategic Importance of the Persian Gulf Region for India

The strategic importance of this region to India can be owed to the presence of a large Indian diaspora in the Gulf States, its over-dependent on sea lanes in the Gulf waters and its energy dependence on the oil-rich Gulf countries. An uninterrupted supply of energy and other valuable products is crucial for developing the Indian economy. The strategic importance of Gulf for India is elaborated in the flowing section.

4.2.1. Energy dependence and safety of sea lanes of communication

India is home to one of the rapidly growing world populations. The efforts of Indian authorities for rapid growth, stability and industrialization require vast oil and gas reserves. On the global level, India is the third biggest importer with some 80% of the oil and 40% of gas imports. The data revealed a significant annual increase in the national spending patterns, up to 5.5 percent in 2016. The International Energy Agency stated that the Indian energy needs suggests an increment of 3.6% annually to cope with sustained growth rates. Moreover, indicators show that this annual percentage of growth rate can be doubled by 2025. Therefore, it is essential to underline that India is on the verge of becoming the most prominent oil importer by 2050 (Pradhan, 2011).

Being home to the largest hydrocarbon reserves, the Persian Gulf lies at the heart of the global energy trade. As per 2018 estimates, the Persian Gulf accounts for about 833.5 billion barrels of proven oil and 74.9 trillion cubic meters of proven gas reserves. It means, the area shares 37.9% of the world's gas reserves and 48.3% of the world's oil reserves (Statistical Review of World Energy, 2019). The Persian Gulf is India's primary source of energy imports due to its enormous hydrocarbon reserves (Dasgupta, 1971). The following table will demonstrate Indian oil imports from the Persian Gulf during the Modi era.

Table 1: India's Oil and Gas Imports from Persian Gulf Region 2014-2019

Year	Oil and gas imports from Persian Gulf	Total oil and gas imports	% of Persian Gulf in total oil and gas imports of India
2014-15	85,300.30	138,352.73	61.65
2015-16	50,992.26	82,966.82	61.46
2016-17	56,335.41	86,970.9	64.78
2017-18	70,090.80	108,665.86	64.50
2018-19	90,337.41	140,926.58	64.10

Source: Persian Gulf: India's Relations with the Region. (2020). P 19. Palgrave Macmillan

Energy security remained a critical agenda for Indian policymakers due to India's rising energy needs. It is over-reliant on Gulf countries, which necessitates India to maintain good friendly ties with these states. Apart from this, the safety and security of Sea Lines of Communication

(SLOC) in the western Indian Ocean is the top priority of India. Any disruption in the area's oil and gas supply lines can jeopardize its vital economic interest. The Indian policymakers regarded the protection of its SLOC as increasingly imperative for securing national and foreign objectives (Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2009). From the strategic standpoint, the Communication Lanes of the Gulf Region can turn the tables during any conflict, skirmish, or war due to the presence of vital choke points like the Strait of Hormoz. The Gulf region is ideally situated at the crossroads of diverse strategic pathways that can prove critical for moving troops, military equipment, etc.

4.2.2. Indian diaspora/ expatriates

An Expatriate is an individual who does not reside in his native country or inhabits an overseas state (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, n.d.). Globalization ensured the exchange of skilful people from the developing to the developed world. The foreign diaspora oft-times prove handy in maintaining the foreign exchange reserves of their respective governments through their remittances. Following the discovery of vast oil and gas deposits, the trend of most migration into the Middle East took form. In the 1970s, large-scale construction projects increased the demand for workers in the vibrant markets of the Gulf States that opened employment chances for Indian workers. Presently, Gulf States are hosting the second-largest Indian expatriates in the world. The Indian emigrants are pivotal to the progress and development of the Indian economy. They contributed roughly 4 to 5% of the total GDP of India. Most foreign remittances are sent to India by the workers in Saudi Arabia and UAE (Rumael, 2014). For gaining Indian foreign policy objectives, as mentioned in IMSS, the Modi government initiated some policy tactics in the region. These are discussed in the subsequent section.

4.3. Approaches of Modi's Regime to Persian Gulf

Despite the Gulf area being crucial for India, it did not receive the deserved attention. Since 2014, PM Modi has prioritized this region under the Look West initiative. He extended his primary attention to the Link West proposal for having closer ties with the Gulf States. The policymakers intended to eliminate potential strategic confusion by having deep synchronization at each level between India and Gulf states (Hall, 2019). Considering this region's delicate and varied political landscape, the Modi government preferred bilateral ties with the Gulf States. This bilateral approach has also assisted India in evading any regional posturing against India. Through a carefully calibrated balance of power, India opted to secure its national interests (Omair, 2021).

In 2015, during the first tenure of Modi, Indian Foreign secretary Jaishankar explicitly said that since antiquity India and Gulf states shared deep relations. He regarded the Indian tilt towards the Gulf States as an evolutionary phase for limitless cooperation and bonding in human and energy sectors. He also hoped to explore further prospects for cooperation and collaboration in the future (Jaishankar, 2015).

After assuming office in 2014, PM Modi visited various Persian Gulf states, reiterating his determination to have a richer understanding and cooperation with Persian Gulf countries. The reciprocal visits were made by the Crown Prince of UAE, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in 2016 and 2017, respectively, after the high-level visit of PM Modi in 2015. In 2018 and 2019, Modi once again visited the UAE (Ministry of External Affairs, GOI 2019). The Prime Minister Modi cautiously acted as a balancer in the fragile and delicate political situation in the Persian Gulf, where both the Tehran and the Riyadh claimed to have the leadership of the Muslim Ummah with deep sectarian fault lines erected based on distinct ideological and political conflicts (Ardemagni, 2018, February 27).

In 2016 and 2019, Modi formally visited Riyadh and Tehran and showed interest in diversifying the relations between the two states. Crown prince Muhammad bin Salman showed his interest in building the largest oil refinery in India. He extended an investment of nearly \$80 billion during his visit in 2019 (Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, 2020). In 2016, Modi visited Tehran and Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, officially visited India in 2018. India showed keen interest in developing the Chabahar port of Iran to counter the Gwadar port of Pakistan. Despite Indian investment, the Iranian tilt towards China made it increasingly difficult for the Modi government to pursue its vision of developing an alternative energy corridor in the Indian Ocean (Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, 2019).

Historically, India and Israel shared good ties. Modi decided to visit Israel in 2017, marking the beginning of a new relationship era, between India and Israel (Chaudhury, 2019). Indian government carefully played its cards to maintain neutrality and balance. So, Modi invited the Palestinian PM Mahmood Abbas to visit New Delhi before he visited Israel. The intention was to guarantee the Arab world that regardless of having warmer relationships with Israel, India backed the Palestinian cause (Omair, 2021).

The Indian administration gradually sorted out the delicate ties with three major players in the Gulf region namely, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel but for deeper and wide-ranging ties India started approaching smaller yet influential Arab states like Oman. In 2018, PM Modi visited Oman. It led to closer bilateral defence engagements between India and Oman. Omani Minister of Defence Affairs reached New Delhi in 2018 and 2020, respectively (Embassy of India Oman, 2021). In 2019, Modi secured a second consecutive term as the prime minister of India. Guests from various nations, including those in the Persian Gulf, were invited to the oath-taking event. Clearly, Persian Gulf and India's maritime neighbours would be the focus of the BJP's second term (Alam et al., 2022; Lou, 2019).

4.4. Indo-Gulf Maritime Relations under Modi

To enhance India's global outreach and influence, the Modi regime paid particular attention to the littoral states of the Persian Gulf region. In this direction Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two major players in Gulf, are very significant. Both Gulf countries of are vital to the India's

maritime interests. However, due to the rivalry between the two Gulf states, maintaining a balanced approach was a substantial challenge for the Modi-led BJP government. Based on the principle of strategic autonomy, India maintained an excellent balance during the first BJP regime (2014-2019).

Due to its geostrategic location, Iran is critical for the Indian aspiration of reaching out to Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republic (CARs) through bypassing Pakistan. India and Iran have been cooperating on the Iranian Chabahar Port for a long. Critical breakthrough was achieved in 2016 when PM Modi visited Iran. India and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement on connecting Chabahar with Afghanistan. The transit route that India aspired to access Afghanistan and CARs via the Iranian Chabahar port made Iran a strategic necessity for India. India tried to maintain its relations with Iran intact despite the rift between Iran and the US over the Iranian Nuclear Program. After the 2018 US unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, India had no option but to submit to US pressures (Ali et al., 2022). This Indian attitude pressed Iran to aggressively pursue its “Look East Policy”. With its Look East approach, Iran and China signed a “25 years Strategic Cooperation agreement” in March 2021. Soon after the agreement, India was excluded from the central rail project that would have connected Chabahar and Zaidan. Some commentators say, this agreement signals the end of friendly relations between India and Iran (Quamar, 2021; Naomi et al., 2021). Despite this, India is keen on improving relations with Iran. In this direction, Indian Foreign and Defence Ministers reached Tehran in September 2020. Indian Foreign Minister again visited Iran in 2021, soon after the new Iranian President (Raisi) assumed office. In March 2021 Iranian Defence Minister and his Air Chief paid an official visit to India (Khushnam, 2021). These reciprocal visits demonstrate that both parties want to improve their defence cooperation but are constrained by structural issues.

Political, commercial, and security connections between India and Saudi Arabia have grown dramatically under PM Modi's administration. India and Saudi Arabia have signed a strategic collaboration agreement. The bilateral defence connections are primarily intended for marine coordination. Consequently, since 2000 the Royal Saudi Naval Forces have actively engaged the Indian Navy via a series of bilateral agreements. Moreover, reciprocity-based goodwill visits by Indian vessels to Saudi Arabia have also surged recently. In 2015, the Indian government provided its aircraft and naval vessels to excavate Saudi citizens trapped in Yemen. This operation was conducted successfully in strategically important areas of the port of Aden. The Indian Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sunil, visited Saudi Arabia in 2018, marking the deepening cooperation and engagement between the two countries. He toured the Saudi naval operations centre, naval fire, and prestigious rescue School. He also had high-level meetings with Saudi authorities (Arabian Defence, 2022). India and Saudi Arabia recently signed a defence intelligence agreement to exchange important information regarding sea-based terrorism, which might jeopardize both countries' fundamental interests (Upadhyaya, 2019). In August 2021, both countries conducted their first-ever bilateral naval exercise “Al-Mohed Al-Hindi” in the Persian Gulf (Bhalla, 2021).

UAE is another critical state in the Gulf region. India enjoys closer economic relations with UAE. Furthermore, it is also home to the largest Indian expatriate community in the Gulf region. However, the Modi administration's proactive policy approach led to the close defence and marine cooperation between the two. In October 2014, Indian Naval ships were in UAE for joint exercises and for training UAE naval personnel for seamanship and navigation. Many Indian naval officers also get regular training in Indian naval academies (Hussain, 2015). To boost already closer maritime ties, Manohar Parrikar (Indian Defence Minister) visited UAE in May 2016. Both sides agreed to boost their relations during this meeting through joint exercises. Both parties discussed the potential for cooperative manufacture and the sale of Indian arms to the UAE (Quamar, 2016). Maritime and anti-terrorism cooperation was the primary focus during 2018s Modi's visit to UAE. During this visit, Modi stated: "We are keen to enhance our defence cooperation, especially in the maritime domain" (Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, 2018). In 2018, at the request of the UAE, Indian marine commandos conducted a naval operation in Goa aimed at rescuing Princess Sheikha Latifa (Upadhyaya, 2019). March 2018 witnessed the first-ever Indo-UAE joint naval exercise, "Gulf Star 1" near Abu Dhabi (Gulf News, 2022). Both navies again joined hands for "Zayed Talwar" naval exercises in August 2021 (Indian Navy, 2021).

Apart from engaging the major players, India extended its maritime cooperation with small yet strategically located states in the Gulf region. Oman shares a maritime zonal boundary with India. As part of the celebrations for the diamond jubilee of Indo-Oman diplomatic ties Indian naval ship (INS Tarangini) visited Oman's port of Salalah in May 2015 (Embassy of India, Muscat, 2015). Indian "Tarangani" and Omani "Shabab" jointly visited the Indian port of Kochi (Press Information Bureau, GOI 2015). In May 2016, the Indian defence minister visited Oman. During this visit, a memorandum of understanding for maritime security and cooperation with each other in the Indian Ocean and Gulf region (Information Bureau, GOI, 2016). The Indian navy gained access to Oman's strategically positioned Duqm port during PM Modi's 2018 visit. Both parties agreed to the "Maritime Transport Agreement" in 2019. (Chaudhury, 2021). Oman has been conducting combined naval drills known as Naseem-al-Bahar since 1993. This naval exercise's most recent series was held in 2020, and the next one is scheduled for 2022. Moreover, both states conducted operations against piracy, smuggling and terrorism in the sea (Chaudhury, 2022).

Despite restrictions on Qatar after the tensions with GCC states, Modi visited Doha in 2016. The Indian defence collaboration with Qatar incorporates joint training, reciprocal visits and ship patrolling. In 2016, the Qatar Emiri Naval Forces (QENF) were invited to the annual evaluation of the International Fleet Review of the Indian Navy. India has also regularly participated in the Doha maritime exhibition (Upadhyaya, 2019). Both sides extended their defence cooperation agreement for five years in 2018. To improve defence relations, the Navy Chief of Qatar visited India in 2019. While its defence minister visited India in February 2020. For delivering covid relief supplies, five Indian navy ships visited Port Hamad of Qatar in May-June 2021. In the same year, IND Tarkash called port Hamad (Ministry of External Affairs,

GOI, 2021). In 2014, high-level Indian officials visited Bahrain, where the fifth US fleet was stationed. In 2018, Bahrain signed a formal agreement for commerce-related security cooperation to secure the sea lanes (Upadhyaya, 2019). Moreover, both states joined hands against illegal sea-borne activities like smuggling and terrorism. In August 2021, Indian INS Kochi visited Manama port of Bahrain to participate in maritime exercises (Indian Navy, 2022). In Kuwait, India also moved toward consolidating Maritime cooperation. Kuwait's extension of operational turnaround facilities for the Indian ships and vessels indicates the growing maritime ties. In 2015, India launched a special naval operation to evacuate Kuwaiti citizens inside Iraq (Upadhyaya, 2019).

5. Implications for Pakistan

Indian ambitious maritime endeavours and closer cooperation with the Gulf States resulted in Pakistan's increasingly dwindling grip on the region. Pakistan seemed concerned about declining diplomatic support and security cooperation with the Gulf States. The security establishment in Pakistan tried to mend the relations by giving explicit support to Saudi led military coalition of Muslim countries (Upadhyaya, 2019; Gul et al., 2021). Recently, India has also offered extensive military training and deep combat cooperation to the Gulf States. Historically, Pakistan's armed forces were favoured for this purpose. However, a gradual change in the priorities of Gulf States remained obvious, especially after Pakistan refused to submit to the pressures for involving in the Yemen crisis. The downward trend in the relationship with Saudi block provided India, the arch-rival of Pakistan, with an opportunity to have closer ties with the Gulf States.

Since the discovery of oil resources in the Middle East, Pakistan chiefly exported human resources like manpower to the Gulf States. The Pakistani emigrants provided valuable foreign remittances that became the source for managing the balance of payment crisis. However, recently Pakistan was hit hard by the growing influx of Indian workers in the Gulf States. Indian workers are more skilled and trained in different fields, increasing the competitiveness of the markets in the Gulf region for Pakistani workers (Emerging Dynamics in the Middle East: Implications and Options for Pakistan, 2022). The managerial and administrative posts are also gradually occupied by Indian nationals making it an uphill task for Pakistan to maintain its relevance in the Gulf markets.

The trade and investment relationship between India and the Gulf states is expanding. While Pakistan's position is shrinking (Siddiqi 2021). For instance, UAE had a market surplus of supplies far more than the market demand. So, there remained persistent disequilibrium in the UAE market, and it worsened in the background of COVID-19. After entering into trade relations with India, the real estate of UAE earned the investment from India that proved to be beneficiary for the economy and property sector of the state. The changing attitude of Gulf states towards Israel and the inflexible attitude of Pakistan towards the new regional developments also added to the declining relevancy of Pakistan in the Middle East. The

principal stance of Pakistan opposes the attempts made by the Gulf States to forge closer ties with Israel. On the other hand, India has friendly connections with Israel and Palestine and may act as a bridge to overcome the obstacles along the road.

The Gulf States likewise viewed the expanding cooperation between Pakistan, Iran, and China with apprehension or suspicion. Pakistan distanced itself from the western block while Gulf States remain crucial US allies. So, India, the new strategic ally of the US, holds more potential for lobbying and mending the deteriorating relationship between the US and Gulf states. India cautiously erected the inroads in the Middle East by underpinning its strategic and economic significance for the Gulf States. In contrast Pakistan remained in dire need of financial support and debt relief from the Gulf States (Bhatnagar, n. d.; Gul et al., 2021).

The Gulf States are also revising their traditional commitments and diplomatic backing for Pakistan on key disputes involving Pakistan and India. For instance, after the unilateral revocation of Article 370 and 35-A in the disputed territory of Kashmir, Pakistan called for a joint OIC session and condemnation of India, however Gulf states described it as an “internal matter” between the two states, hardly rising any substantial support for Pakistani narrative (Siddiqi, 2021). Pakistan condemned and complained about the role of OIC on this matter and voiced its obvious disappointment. Pakistan is trying to diplomatically resolve the impediments and crevices in the bilateral ties with the Gulf States, but it appears to be a difficult chore (Khalid, 2021).

6. Conclusion

The Gulf region is of primary interest to Indian policymakers for securing Indian strategic interests in the maritime domain. Under the reign of PM Modi, India gradually erected a cautious foreign policy approach to build inroads in the Middle East. India assumed neutrality and balanced the rival ideologies in the region by offering pragmatic bilateral defence and economic ties to the Gulf States. India decided to secure the role of a net security provider for the states residing in the direct and extended neighbourhood of the Indian Ocean that can pave the path for long-term security, permanence, and tranquillity in this strategic region. Indian policymakers also directed their attention toward the need to enhance their naval capabilities and exchange coordinated efforts with regional or extra-regional navies. Energy security continued to be a critical agenda for India because of its domestic requirements and heightened demands. Any disruption in the oil and gas supply lines coming from the Gulf States can jeopardize the vital economic interests of India. The Indian policymakers regarded the protection of Sea Lines of communication (SLOC) as increasingly imperative and vital for securing national and foreign objectives. So, the Modi government is aiming for proficiency in all naval domains by building a modern blue navy. Historically, due to the nature of disputes and clashes with immediate neighbours, India prioritized the modernization of only land and air power. At the same time production and innovation of naval and maritime security were placed on the back burner. The PM Modi administration appears exceptionally eager to

renovate India into a naval might through strategic partnership agreements and reciprocal visits at high levels.

In a complex region like the Persian Gulf Indian government have opted for developing bilateral relations to avert any strategic confusion with its partners in the region. Since 2015, Modi has visited Gulf region states and signed several MOUs to diversify and deepen relations. It resulted in the growing alienation of Pakistan in the Gulf region. Under Modi, India has replaced Pakistan in the export of human resource and cordial security cooperation with Gulf monarchs especially, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Though Pakistan tried to manage the crevices, the cordial ties with the Gulf States deteriorated because of the conflicting point of view over the Yemen crisis and Kashmir issue. The unbending stance of Pakistan over the normalization of relations with Israel proved to be a stumbling block to smooth relations with the Gulf States. Despite challenges, Pakistan is trying to mend its relations with the Gulf States. Major reason for deteriorating Pakistan-Gulf ties is the sole focus of Pakistan's foreign office on ideological/religious affinity. As a result, Pak-Gulf relations were only oratory. Comparatively, India has successfully transformed its relations with the countries of the Persian Gulf into solid strategic and economic partnerships. The only way Pakistan can improve its standing in Gulf is that Pak-Gulf ties must be transformed from Pakistan's economic dependence on Gulf to mutually independent relations.

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