



## MODERN DIPLOMACY: INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MIDDLE EAST UNDER THE LOOK WEST POLICY

Jhilike Saha<sup>1</sup>  & Moupriya Biswas<sup>2</sup> 

### RESEARCH ARTICLE



#### Author Details:

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Scholar,  
Department of Political Science,  
Rabindra Bharati University,  
Kolkata, West Bengal, India;  
<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. Scholar,  
Department of Political Science,  
The University of Burdwan,  
West Bengal, India

#### Corresponding Author:

Jhilike Saha

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#### Abstract

India's "Look West" policy marks a strategic shift in its foreign policy, focusing on enhancing relations with the Middle East. This engagement aims to bolster economic, security, and cultural ties, recognizing the region's geopolitical significance and its substantial Indian diaspora. The policy emphasizes multi-faceted cooperation across energy security, trade, investment, counter-terrorism, and cultural exchange. Energy security is paramount, as India imports a significant portion of its oil and gas from the Middle East. Strengthening these energy ties ensures stable and affordable energy supplies vital for India's economic growth. Additionally, the policy seeks to expand bilateral trade and investment, tapping into the economic potential of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and leveraging free trade agreements. Security cooperation is another critical component. Given the rise of terrorism and regional instability, India collaborates with Middle Eastern countries on intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism measures, and defense training. This cooperation aims to safeguard both regions from extremist threats and enhance regional stability. Cultural and people-to-people ties also play a crucial role. The Indian diaspora in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf states, forms a bridge between India and the region, fostering mutual understanding and goodwill. Educational exchanges, cultural programs, and tourism further cement these connections. India's Look West policy underscores its pragmatic approach to foreign relations, balancing traditional ties with new alliances. By engaging deeply with the Middle East, India not only secures its strategic interests but also positions itself as an important player in regional and global politics. This policy reflects India's broader ambition to be a leading global power, demonstrating its capacity to navigate complex international landscapes while fostering regional cooperation and development.

**Keywords:** *Diplomacy, India's Engagement, Middle East, Look West Policy, Global Power*

#### Introduction

India had a relation with West Asia since a period of thousand years. In contrast to our look east policy, a strong and comprehensive policy framework towards the west has long been lacking. West Asia is a segment of lingering neighborhood. Peace and stability in this province are a crucial strategic interest to India. Dr. Manmohan Singh first came up with the concept of 'Look West Policy'. India's 'Look West' policy marks a significant strategic shift, reflecting its growing engagement with the Middle East. This policy, an extension of the earlier "Look East" policy, underscores India's recognition of the Middle East's geopolitical and economic importance. As one of the world's fastest-growing economies and a rising global power, India's foreign policy initiatives, particularly in the Middle East, aim to secure energy resources, enhance trade relations, and foster geopolitical partnerships (Singh, 2015). The Middle East is important to India's energy security, with the region supplying a substantial portion of its oil and gas requirements. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, and Iraq are key energy suppliers. Recognizing this dependence, India has sought to diversify its energy imports, engage in joint ventures, and invest in energy infrastructure in the Middle East. This not only ensures a stable supply of energy but also cements economic ties. Trade and investment form another cornerstone of the Look West policy. The Middle East is one of India's largest trading partners, with significant exports of goods and services. The UAE, in particular, stands out as a major trading hub, facilitating extensive bilateral trade. Additionally, India has been attracting investment from Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds into various sectors such as infrastructure, technology, and agriculture, thereby fostering economic interdependence. Geopolitical dynamics have also prompted India to deepen its engagement with the Middle East (Blarel, 2021). The region's strategic location, at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe, makes it a crucial partner for India's broader regional aspirations. India has been actively involved in regional security dialogues, counter-terrorism initiatives, and maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Collaborations with countries like Israel in defense and technology further exemplify the multifaceted nature of India's

engagement. Moreover, the significant Indian diaspora in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, plays a vital role in shaping bilateral relations. The remittances from Indian expatriates contribute significantly to India's economy, while their presence strengthens cultural and people-to-people ties. In recent years, India's Look West policy has also navigated the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, balancing relationships with rival powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. This nuanced diplomacy reflects India's commitment to a multi-aligned foreign policy, seeking to maximize its strategic autonomy and regional influence. India's Look West policy signifies a strategic, economic, and cultural convergence with the Middle East. Through this policy, India aims to secure its energy needs, enhance trade and investment, foster geopolitical alliances, and strengthen its global standing, making the Middle East a central pillar of its foreign policy architecture. At the first Raisina Dialogue on March the 2nd, 2016, Foreign Secretary Dr. S. Jaishankar noted: "If the eastern front is building upon longstanding policy, the western one is relatively more recent conceptually..." He went on to say, "I can confidently predict that 'Act East' would be matched with 'Think West'."

India has a strategic interest in West Asia since post-independence period. India's "Look West" policy, articulated in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, marks a strategic pivot in its foreign policy, emphasizing deepened engagement with the Middle East. This initiative aims to bolster economic ties, foster energy security, and strengthen geopolitical partnerships, engaging security and intelligence co-operation in a region of critical importance to India's national interests (Bajpae, 2024).

### *Economic Partnerships*

**Trade Relations:** India's trade with the Middle East has seen exponential growth under the Look West policy. GCC countries are India's largest trading partners along with West Asian and North African countries. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain, have emerged as significant trading partners. According to Indian Ministry of Commerce data for July, 2018, trade with the Gulf in 2017- 2018 was over 123 billion U.S. dollars, the UAE alone accounting for U.S. dollars 50 billion. Bilateral trade between India and the GCC exceeded \$100 billion in recent years, with a diverse range of traded goods including petroleum products, gold, electronics, and textiles. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are particularly noteworthy, with the UAE being India's third-largest trading partner and Saudi Arabia serving as a key source of oil imports (Saraswat, 2023).

**Energy Security:** Energy supply is the main interest for India in this particular region from long time. In recent time, India is the fourth largest energy absorbing country in the world and hope, it will be third country in upcoming decades. Energy security forms the cornerstone of India's engagement with the Middle East. The region accounts for approximately 60% of India's crude oil imports. Saudi Arabia and Iraq are pivotal suppliers, and India has been negotiating long-term contracts to ensure stable and affordable energy supplies. Additionally, India has invested in upstream oil and gas projects in countries like the UAE, ensuring a stake in the region's energy infrastructure. India's desire to form a "strategic energy partnership" with the region to secure the country's long-term energy supply was presumably driven by the country's increasing energy needs (Saraswat, 2023).

### *Investments and Infrastructure*

**Mutual Investments:** Another important objective of India is to attract foreign direct investment from the prosperous Gulf region. Investment flows between India and the Middle East have been robust. There is a huge potential for the Gulf countries to invest in many Indian industries for mutual benefit. Sovereign wealth funds from countries such as the UAE and Qatar have invested in Indian infrastructure, real estate, and technology sectors. For instance, the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and Mubadala Investment Company have made substantial investments in Indian renewable energy projects and startups. Conversely, Indian firms, particularly in the IT and construction sectors, have established a significant presence in the Middle East, contributing to local economies and diversifying India's economic footprint (Dentice, 2024).

**Infrastructure Development:** Infrastructure development has been another focal point. Indian companies are actively involved in construction projects across the Middle East, ranging from airports to residential complexes. These projects not only boost bilateral economic ties but also enhance India's soft power in the region. Major Indian firms like Larsen & Toubro and Tata Projects have been pivotal in executing high-value contracts, showcasing Indian expertise in engineering and project management. India provides chances to international investors in a number of fields, including higher education, biotechnology, information technology, science and technology, infrastructure, and healthcare (Dentice, 2024).

### *Geopolitical Implications*

While India's relations with the countries of the Persian Gulf, and West Asia have been shaped by the dynamics of oil and energy trade, there is a growing awareness that the traditional buyer-seller relationship is no longer appropriate. India's Look West policy also has significant geopolitical dimensions towards this region. India is eager to deepen strategic connections in the area. Strengthening economic ties with the Middle East enhances India's strategic autonomy and balances its relations with global powers. Cooperation in counterterrorism, maritime security, and defense has further solidified these partnerships, providing a comprehensive framework for mutual growth and stability. India's Look West policy has redefined its engagement with the Middle East, transforming economic partnerships and ensuring energy security. Through robust trade, mutual investments, and strategic collaborations, India has not only secured its economic interests but also cemented its role as a key player in the region's geopolitical landscape. This multifaceted approach continues to drive the dynamic and evolving India-Middle East relationship. India's ties with the Muslim world are warming. This would facilitate strengthening of India's ties with groups such as the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) (Ningthoujam, 2024).

India's "Look West" policy represents a strategic important towards the Middle East, underscoring the importance of this region in India's geopolitical and strategic calculus. This engagement is driven by several factors, including energy security, economic interests, and regional security dynamics. The Middle East is crucial for India's energy security, with the region accounting for the majority of India's crude oil and natural gas imports. Countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Iran are key suppliers. Ensuring stable energy supplies at reasonable prices is essential for sustaining India's economic growth. Additionally, the Middle East is a significant market for Indian goods and services, including textiles, engineering products, and software services. The region is also a major source of remittances from the large Indian diaspora working there, which contributes substantially to India's foreign exchange reserves (Bajpae, 2024).

India's engagement with the Middle East is also influenced by the need to counterbalance China's growing influence in the region. To counter China's influence, India is forming closer ties with this region. India is wanting to make a stable partner. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has seen substantial investments in Middle Eastern infrastructure, posing a strategic challenge to India. In response, India has sought to strengthen its ties with key regional players. For instance, India's relations with the UAE have evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership, encompassing defense cooperation, counterterrorism, and intelligence sharing. India is already part of an almost operational international North-South Corridor connecting India to Russia through Iran and Central Asia, and now this "Middle East Corridor" would open a new economic channel for India (Ningthoujam, 2024).

Security cooperation is another critical aspect of India's Look West policy. The Middle East's geopolitical volatility, marked by conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and the broader Sunni-Shia divide, directly impacts India's security environment. Collaborating on counterterrorism and intelligence sharing with countries like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE is vital for India to manage regional threats, including terrorism and radicalization. The defense relationship with Israel, in particular, has grown, with India becoming one of the largest buyers of Israeli defense technology (Saraswat, 2023).

**Multilateral and Bilateral Engagements:** India has also been proactive in engaging with regional multilateral forums such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). While historically sidelined in the OIC due to Pakistan's influence, India's growing economic clout has led to a more pragmatic approach from some member states. Bilateral engagements have been reinforced through high-level visits, exemplified by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trips to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, which have resulted in numerous agreements spanning energy, infrastructure, and security. India's "Look West policy" is a multifaceted approach designed to secure energy supplies, enhance economic ties, and bolster strategic partnerships in the Middle East. This policy reflects India's broader objective of asserting itself as a key player in regional and global geopolitics, balancing the influences of other major powers, and ensuring its own national security and economic interests (Abba, 2024).

### ***Cultural and People to People Ties***

India's Look West policy, initiated to enhance engagement with West Asia, extends beyond economic and strategic dimensions to encompass significant cultural and people-to-people ties. This multifaceted approach aims to leverage historical connections and shared cultural heritage to foster deeper, more enduring relationships. Historically, India's interaction with West Asia dates back millennia, marked by trade, migration, and cultural exchange. The ancient Silk Route and maritime trade routes facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures between India and West Asian civilizations. This historical interconnectedness laid a foundation for contemporary cultural diplomacy and people-to-people engagement under the Look West policy. Cultural exchanges play a pivotal role in this policy. India and West Asian countries share rich cultural traditions, particularly in the realms of music, dance, art, and literature. Events such as cultural festivals, exhibitions, and art exchanges help to showcase this shared heritage (Dentice, 2024). For example, the International Day of Yoga, celebrated widely in West Asia, underscores India's soft power and the universal appeal of its cultural practices. Educational collaboration is another significant facet. India has become a preferred destination for West Asian students pursuing higher education, particularly in fields like engineering, medicine, and management. This educational exchange not only enhances bilateral ties but also creates a network of alumni who act as cultural ambassadors, fostering goodwill and mutual understanding. The Indian diaspora in West Asia is a crucial element of people-to-people ties. Millions of Indians live and work in countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. This diaspora acts as a bridge between India and West Asia, facilitating cultural exchange and economic ties. The remittances sent back home contribute significantly to India's economy, while the cultural practices they uphold help maintain a connection to Indian heritage abroad (Yousuf, 2024). Tourism also bolsters cultural connections. Pilgrimages and religious tourism are vital, with many Indians visiting holy sites in West Asia, and vice versa. This spiritual exchange strengthens cultural bonds and mutual respect. The Indian government, under the Look West policy, has actively promoted these cultural and people-to-people ties through various initiatives. For instance, cultural centers established by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in West Asia serve as hubs for cultural activities, language courses, and heritage preservation. Additionally, bilateral agreements on cultural cooperation and regular high-level visits emphasize the importance of cultural diplomacy. Although India's Look West policy effectively harnesses cultural and people-to-people ties to enhance bilateral relations with West Asia. By building on historical connections and promoting contemporary exchanges in education, arts, and tourism, India aims to create a robust, multifaceted relationship that goes beyond economic and strategic interests. This cultural diplomacy fosters mutual understanding, respect, and long-term cooperation between India and West Asia (Ningthoujam, 2024).

### **Defence and Military Cooperation**

Military cooperation has gained special importance in the fight against common security threats. Both India and the Gulf states have expressed concern over the rise of terrorism, piracy and Islamic extremism. There is growing concern about crime, money laundering and the rise of illegal arms trade between regions. Special attention was paid to military cooperation to fight common security threats. Both India and the Gulf states have expressed concern over the rise of terrorism, piracy and Islamic extremism. Concern about crime, money laundering and illegal arms trade between the two regions is growing. India's defense cooperation with Middle Eastern countries has grown substantially. With the UAE, for instance, India has established a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, which includes defense training, military exercises, and technology transfers. In 2017, India and the UAE conducted their first naval exercise, reflecting mutual interest in securing maritime routes and ensuring regional stability. Similarly, India and Saudi Arabia have enhanced their military ties, with joint naval exercises and high-level visits, such as the Indian Chief of Army Staff's visit to Riyadh in 2020, highlighting a commitment to defense collaboration (Saraswat, 2023).

**Strategic Partnerships:** India's Look West policy also involves forging strategic partnerships with key regional players. Iran, despite geopolitical complexities, remains vital for India's strategic calculus, especially concerning Afghanistan and Central Asia. The development of the Chabahar port exemplifies India's strategic investment in Iran, providing a critical transit route bypassing Pakistan. This port not only facilitates trade but also has strategic military implications, potentially serving as a logistical hub for Indian naval operations (Dentice, 2024).

**Counterterrorism and Security Collaboration:** Counterterrorism is a critical aspect of India's Look West policy. India has engaged in robust intelligence-sharing mechanisms and counterterrorism collaborations with countries like Israel. The India-Israel relationship is particularly noteworthy, with both nations cooperating extensively in intelligence, cybersecurity, and anti-terrorism operations. India's procurement of advanced defence systems from Israel, such as the Barak-8 missile system, underscores the depth of this security partnership (Abba, 2024).

**Maritime Security:** Maritime security is another cornerstone of India's defence engagement with the Middle East. The Indian Navy regularly undertakes joint exercises with regional navies, emphasizing the importance of securing the vital sea lanes of communication that are crucial for global energy trade. The Indian Ocean, being a strategic waterway, sees significant Indian naval presence, with initiatives like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) fostering regional maritime cooperation (Bajpae, 2024).

**Technological and Industrial Collaboration:** Defence technology and industrial collaboration form another pillar of India's Look West policy. Joint ventures and technology transfers, especially with countries like Israel and the UAE, are enhancing India's defence manufacturing capabilities. The collaboration extends to areas such as drone technology, missile defence systems, and cybersecurity, aligning with India's broader goal of self-reliance in defence production under the 'Make in India' initiative. India's Look West policy reflects a nuanced and multi-faceted approach to engaging with the Middle East. By strengthening defence and security ties, India not only ensures the safety of its strategic interests but also contributes to regional stability. This policy, integrating economic, strategic, and defence dimensions, underscores India's growing role as a key player in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East (Vidal, 2024).

### **Infrastructure and Development Projects**

"Look West" policy represents a strategic shift in its foreign policy towards enhanced engagement with the countries of West Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. This approach complements India's "Look East" and "Act East" policies, reflecting a broader vision of fostering economic and strategic partnerships. The policy has significant implications for infrastructure and development projects, aiming to bolster connectivity, energy security, and bilateral trade (Vidal, 2024).

**Strategic and Economic Context:** West Asia is crucial for India due to its vast energy resources, economic potential, and the presence of a large Indian diaspora. India's engagement in the region is driven by the necessity to secure energy supplies, expand trade, and enhance geopolitical influence. The "Look West" policy emphasizes bilateral and multilateral partnerships, focusing on infrastructure development as a means to strengthen these ties (Ningthoujam, 2024).

### **Key Infrastructure and Development Projects**

#### **1. Energy and Petrochemical Ventures:**

- Chabahar Port: India's investment in the Chabahar Port in Iran is a strategic project to improve connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. This port facilitates trade and economic cooperation, contributing to regional stability.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves: India has been collaborating with GCC countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia to develop and fill strategic petroleum reserves. These projects ensure a stable energy supply and mitigate the risks associated with global oil market fluctuations.

#### **2. Transportation and Connectivity:**

- International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC): This multimodal transport project aims to link India with Iran, Russia, and eventually Europe, reducing transit time and costs. It enhances trade routes and fosters economic cooperation.

- **Air and Maritime Links:** India has been enhancing air connectivity with major West Asian cities to facilitate trade, tourism, and the movement of the Indian diaspora. Improved maritime links also play a crucial role in boosting bilateral trade.
- 3. Urban Development and Smart Cities:**
    - **Collaborative Urban Projects:** Indian companies are involved in urban development projects in the GCC, contributing expertise in smart city development, urban planning, and infrastructure. These projects include construction, water management, and sustainable energy solutions.
  - 4. Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure:**
    - **Digital Collaboration:** India and GCC countries are increasingly collaborating on digital infrastructure, including undersea cable projects and the establishment of digital corridors. This enhances cybersecurity, data exchange, and technological cooperation. Despite significant progress, India's "Look West" policy faces challenges, including regional instability, geopolitical tensions, and economic fluctuations. However, the prospects remain promising due to mutual economic interests, the Indian diaspora's influential presence, and shared concerns about energy security and counter-terrorism. "Look West" policy marks a pivotal expansion of its strategic outreach, emphasizing infrastructure and development projects as key components. By investing in energy, connectivity, urban development, and digital infrastructure, India aims to build robust economic and strategic partnerships with West Asian countries, ensuring mutual growth and stability (Vidal, 2024).

### **Diplomatic Engagements**

**Strategic Interests:** The "Look West" policy primarily aims at enhancing energy security, fostering trade, and strengthening strategic partnerships. The Persian Gulf, a vital source of India's energy imports, plays a crucial role in this strategy. Countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, and Iraq are among India's top oil suppliers. Thus, stable and strong relations with these nations are imperative for India's energy security (Blarel, 2021).

**Economic Engagement:** Trade and investment are central to the "Look West" policy. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are significant trading partners, with bilateral trade reaching substantial figures. The UAE, in particular, is a crucial hub for Indian exports and investments. Indian businesses have a significant presence in the UAE, and there is a robust flow of investments between the two nations. Additionally, the policy encourages enhanced economic cooperation with countries like Israel and Iran. With Israel, India has deepened collaboration in sectors like agriculture, technology, and defense. In Iran, the development of the Chabahar Port is a critical project, enhancing connectivity and providing India a strategic foothold in the region (Vidal, 2024).

**Diaspora and Cultural Links:** The Indian diaspora in West Asia, especially in the Gulf countries, is a significant factor in India's "Look West" policy. Millions of Indians work in these countries, contributing to their economies and sending substantial remittances back home. This diaspora acts as a bridge, fostering people-to-people ties and strengthening bilateral relations (Bajpae, 2024).

**Security and Strategic Cooperation:** Security and defense cooperation are integral to the "Look West" policy. India has engaged in joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism efforts with countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Maritime security in the Indian Ocean is another focal area, with India aiming to ensure the safety of crucial sea lanes (Ningthoujam, 2024).

**Diplomatic Initiatives:** Under the "Look West" policy, high-level diplomatic visits and engagements have intensified. Indian leaders have made numerous visits to West Asian countries, reciprocated by visits from their counterparts. These interactions have resulted in multiple agreements and memorandums of understanding, covering diverse areas from energy to defense to culture. By fostering energy security, enhancing trade and investment, leveraging the diaspora, and building robust security partnerships, India aims to secure its national interests and bolster its global standing. This policy not only strengthens bilateral ties but also contributes to regional stability and prosperity (Yousuf, 2024).

**Energy Security:** The Middle East has become a cornerstone of India's strategy for energy security. This region is pivotal due to its vast hydrocarbon reserves, and India's growing economy has led to an increasing demand for energy. The policy thus aims to ensure stable and diversified energy supplies while fostering broader economic and strategic relations (Abba, 2024).

### **Key Elements of India's "Look West" Policy**

- 1. Diversification of Energy Sources:** West Asia holds some of the largest oil and natural gas reserves in the world. Countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Iran are critical suppliers of crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) to India. By maintaining robust relations with multiple countries in this region, India reduces its over-reliance on any single supplier, enhancing energy security.
- 2. Long-term Supply Agreements:** India has engaged in long-term agreements with several West Asian countries to secure stable energy supplies. For instance, Indian oil companies have signed multi-year contracts with Saudi Aramco and ADNOC (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company) for the supply of crude oil. These agreements provide a reliable supply chain, shielding India from global market volatility.

- 3. Strategic Investments and Partnerships:** Indian companies have invested in the upstream and downstream sectors in West Asia. Notable investments include ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) in offshore gas fields in Iran and exploration ventures in Iraq. Additionally, Indian companies are involved in joint ventures for refining and petrochemical projects in the region, such as the Ratnagiri Refinery project in partnership with Saudi Aramco and ADNOC.
- 4. Energy Infrastructure Development:** The construction of strategic petroleum reserves (SPRs) in India, partly filled with oil from West Asian countries, is a direct outcome of the Look West policy. These reserves act as a buffer against supply disruptions and price spikes, enhancing energy security.
- 5. Renewable Energy Cooperation:** India is also exploring renewable energy collaboration with West Asian countries. The region's potential for solar energy, combined with India's expertise, offers opportunities for joint projects and technology exchange. For example, the International Solar Alliance (ISA) has seen participation from several West Asian countries, aligning with India's renewable energy goals.
- 6. Geopolitical and Diplomatic Engagement:** Diplomatic efforts under the Look West policy also aim to navigate the complex geopolitics of the region. India's balanced approach, maintaining good relations with rival states like Saudi Arabia and Iran, helps ensure continuous energy supplies despite regional tensions. Through the diversifying energy sources, securing long-term supply contracts, investing in the region's energy sector, and building strategic reserves, India mitigates the risks associated with energy imports. Moreover, the policy's scope, encompassing both hydrocarbons and renewable energy, ensures a holistic approach to meeting India's growing energy needs. This multifaceted engagement not only stabilizes energy supply chains but also strengthens economic and strategic ties with West Asia, reflecting India's broader foreign policy objectives.

### **Future Prospects**

Looking ahead, India's engagement with the Middle East will likely be shaped by several emerging trends:

- 1. Diversification of Energy Sources:** As India seeks to diversify its energy sources, collaboration on renewable energy projects will gain momentum. Countries in the Middle East are investing in solar and wind energy, presenting opportunities for joint ventures and technology transfer.
- 2. Digital and Technological Collaboration:** The Middle East's growing interest in technology and innovation aligns with India's strengths in IT and digital services. Collaborations in fintech, health tech, and smart cities can drive mutual growth.
- 3. Geopolitical Realignments:** The evolving geopolitical landscape, including the Abraham Accords and shifting alliances, presents both challenges and opportunities. India's ability to navigate these dynamics while maintaining its strategic autonomy will be critical.
- 4. Maritime Security:** With the Indian Ocean being a vital conduit for global trade, maritime security cooperation will become increasingly important. Joint naval exercises and anti-piracy operations can enhance regional stability. India's Look West policy underscores a multifaceted engagement with the Middle East, focusing on energy security, economic cooperation, geopolitical stability, and people-to-people ties. By capitalizing on emerging opportunities and navigating geopolitical complexities, India can reinforce its strategic presence and foster a mutually beneficial partnership with the Middle East.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, India's engagement with the Middle East under its Look West Policy has been marked by strategic depth and mutual benefits, focusing on energy security, economic ties, and geopolitical stability. The policy, formalized in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, aimed to enhance bilateral and multilateral relationships with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Iran, and other Middle Eastern nations. Energy security remains a cornerstone of India's Look West Policy (Sharma, 2023). The Middle East is a crucial supplier of oil and natural gas, vital for India's growing energy needs. Countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran are among India's top energy suppliers, ensuring a steady flow of resources essential for sustaining economic growth. Economic collaboration extends beyond energy. Trade and investment between India and Middle Eastern countries have expanded significantly. India has established itself as a major trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching substantial volumes. Indian expatriates form a significant part of the workforce in the Gulf, contributing to both the local economies and remittance flows back to India. Infrastructure development, telecommunications, and information technology are other sectors witnessing robust cooperation (Ningthoujam, 2024). Geopolitically, India's engagement aims to balance relations with key players, navigating complex regional dynamics. This includes maintaining strong ties with Israel while simultaneously deepening connections with Arab states and Iran. Diplomatic initiatives, such as high-level visits and strategic dialogues, have strengthened mutual trust and cooperation. Cultural and people-to-people exchanges also play a vital role in this engagement (Saraswat, 2023). Historical connections and a large Indian diaspora in the Middle East facilitate a unique cultural affinity, enhancing bilateral relations. In the India's Look West Policy reflects a pragmatic approach to leveraging economic opportunities, ensuring energy security, and navigating geopolitical complexities. By fostering comprehensive partnerships, India has positioned itself as a significant player in the Middle East, contributing to regional stability and mutual prosperity (Singh, 2015).

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