

Concept Note

Exploring the Western Indo-Pacific:

Prospects and Challenges of Engagement with the Western Indo-Pacific Nations

2nd September, 2019

1400 hours-1800 hours

The Indo-Pacific is a vast and integrated region encompassing the area between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean and spreading from the Eastern Coast of Africa to the Western Coasts of the US. The region has been conceptualized as an integrated whole but there has been an excessive focus on the Eastern Indo-Pacific, that is on the regions east of India, at the expense of a focus on regions west of India. While the regions east of India have been an area of interest for the Indian policy establishment, India continues to have crucial stakes in the regions west of India.

India's extensive interests lie in crucial regions like the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, the straits of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and Africa. First, India has deep-seated interests in the Persian Gulf, the straits of Hormuz and Iran owing to the fact that Iran was a significant contributor to India's energy requirements until the US threatened sanctions on countries that imported oil from Iran. Furthermore, the straits of Hormuz is a major naval choke point as it sits at the cusp of International Shipping Lanes (ISL) and Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC) in the Persian Gulf region. Second, the Bab-el-Mandeb and the Horn of Africa are of importance to India owing to their location at the junction between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. It is a crucial naval choke point between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, China's heightened naval presence in the region has been a case of suspicion for India's policy circle. Third, Africa is a continent with immense potential for growth and India is looking for agreements for collaborative economic growth and development with Africa.

Finally, India's interest in the smaller island chains of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) cannot be overstated. India has telling interests in Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives, Madagascar, Mozambique and Comoros inter alia. Enhanced cooperation with the aforementioned littoral and island nations will accentuate the ability of India to enhance its Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the India Ocean Region. It is, therefore, in India's interest to view the region as an integrated whole and ensure that none of the sub-regions of the IOR are devoid of due focus.

Keeping with the aforementioned, this conference envisages stressing upon the need to have an integrated Indo-Pacific and the IOR, and, to highlight India's vital strategic interests in the region to its West.

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