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Recalibrating Indian strategic posture: navigating the geopolitical shifts in West Asia post Arab spring

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Abstract

This paper examines India's evolving strategic posture in West Asia and North Africa (WANA) in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011. Drawing on the significant geopolitical realignments that have emerged in the region, this research analyzes how India has recalibrated its approach to navigate complex regional dynamics while advancing its core national interests. Through a comprehensive assessment of India's diplomatic, economic, and security engagements with key regional powers, the paper highlights India's pragmatic multi-alignment strategy that has enabled it to maintain constructive relationships across competing regional blocs. The research further explores emerging multilateral frameworks involving India in the region and evaluates the implications of India's approach for the evolving global order. The paper argues that India's balanced engagement with WANA represents a successful adaptation to post-Arab spring realities and positions India as an increasingly significant player in shaping the region's future trajectory.

Keywords: India, West Asia and North Africa, Arab spring, strategic posture, multi-alignment strategy

Introduction

The turbulent events of the Arab Spring in 2011 triggered far-reaching transformations across the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region, fundamentally altering its political landscape and reconfiguring regional power dynamics. What began as popular uprisings demanding political reforms, economic opportunities, and dignity evolved into complex processes that toppled longstanding authoritarian regimes in some countries while reinforcing state repression in others (Lynch, 2016, p. 52) ^[28]. These upheavals have not only reshaped internal governance structures across the region but have also catalyzed significant geopolitical realignments, creating a more fluid and multipolar regional order.

For India, these developments have presented both challenges and opportunities in a region vital to its strategic interests. As Pant (2023, p. 54) ^[35] notes, "The post-Arab Spring environment has required India to navigate a complex web of regional rivalries, civil conflicts, and great power competition while protecting its substantial economic, energy, and diaspora interests in the region." With over nine million Indian expatriates in the region contributing significantly to India's economy through remittances (Jain, 2022, p. 18) ^[20], and with approximately 60% of India's oil imports and 90% of its gas imports originating from WANA (Pradhan, 2023, p. 76) ^[39], the stakes for India in regional stability are exceptionally high.

This paper examines how India has recalibrated its strategic posture to navigate the shifting geopolitical terrain of post-Arab Spring WANA. It argues that India has pursued a pragmatic approach characterized by strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, enabling it to maintain balanced relationships with competing powers in the region while advancing its core national interests. As Ganguly (2021, p. 47) ^[13] observes, "India's approach reflects a careful balancing act that prioritizes its economic and security interests while avoiding entanglement in regional rivalries and conflicts".

The research addresses several key questions: How have the Post-Arab spring transformations in WANA affected India's strategic interests in the region? How has India adapted its diplomatic, economic, and security engagements to navigate these changes? What role has India played in emerging multilateral frameworks in the region? And what are the implications of India's approach for the evolving global order?.

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To answer these questions, the paper is structured as follows: Section II provides an overview of the geopolitical shifts in WANA since the Arab Spring, focusing on political transitions, regional realignments, and the evolving roles of external powers. Section III examines India's strategic interests in WANA and how they have been affected by regional developments. Section IV analyzes India's diplomatic, economic, and security engagements with key countries in the region. Section V explores India's role in emerging multilateral frameworks. Section VI discusses the implications of India's approach for the global order. The paper concludes by reflecting on the future trajectory of India-WANA relations and their significance for regional stability and global politics.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative analytical approach to investigate India's evolving strategic posture in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. At the core of the methodology is a comprehensive review of relevant academic literature that explores the geopolitical transformations in WANA triggered by the Arab Spring. Scholarly analyses on regional realignments, regime changes, and the subsequent shifts in political power structures provide the foundational context for examining India's foreign policy adaptations. The research also draws upon official policy documents, government white papers, and public statements issued by Indian authorities and key WANA states. These sources help identify strategic intentions, diplomatic priorities, and ideological undercurrents guiding India's regional engagements.

In addition to textual analysis, the study scrutinizes bilateral and multilateral agreements involving India and WANA countries, focusing on trade statistics, energy cooperation, and security partnerships. Diplomatic exchanges, high-level visits, and formal joint statements are assessed to trace the trajectory of India's growing involvement in the region. The research further evaluates India's diaspora policy and its relevance in shaping soft power and cultural diplomacy across WANA. Special attention is given to India's role in emerging regional and trans regional platforms such as the India-UAE-France trilateral and the I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE, and the United States) initiative. A comparative analysis is employed to contrast India's strategic behavior with that of other major external powers such as China, the United States, and Russia thus situating India's approach within broader international dynamics. This multifaceted and integrative methodology provides a nuanced understanding of India's adaptive foreign policy and its implications for regional stability and the global strategic balance.

Geopolitical Shifts in WANA since the Arab spring political transitions and regional instability

The Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 triggered a wave of political transitions across WANA with varied outcomes. As Khatib (2017, p. 33) ^[22] observes, "What began as peaceful protests demanding political reforms quickly escalated into revolutionary movements that toppled longstanding authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen". However, the trajectory of these transitions has been far from uniform, with most countries experiencing significant challenges to democratic consolidation.

Tunisia initially made the most substantial progress toward democratic transition, adopting a new constitution in 2014 and holding free elections. However, as Hamid (2021, p. 112) ^[19] notes, "Tunisia has experienced democratic backsliding since 2021, with President Kais Saied suspending parliament and ruling by decree, raising concerns about the future of its democratic experiment." In Egypt, the brief democratic opening following the ouster of Hosni Mubarak was cut short by a military coup in 2013 that brought General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power. Under Sisi's leadership, Egypt has experienced significant democratic regression, with widespread repression of political opposition, civil society, and media (Brown, 2020, p. 67) ^[8]. Libya and Yemen, meanwhile, descended into protracted civil wars involving multiple domestic factions backed by external powers. According to Mezran and Miller (2023, p. 28) ^[32], "Libya has experienced cycles of conflict and fragile ceasefires since 2011, with rival governments in the east and west backed by different international patrons, though the country has seen periods of relative stability since 2021." In Yemen, Feierstein (2022, p. 91) ^[11] highlights that "the collapse of the transition process led to a devastating civil war involving regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran, resulting in one of the world's worst humanitarian crises".

Syria's uprising evolved into a brutal civil war that has drawn in multiple regional and global powers. As Phillips (2023, p. 87) ^[38] argues, "The Syrian conflict became a theater for proxy competition involving Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States, resulting in massive displacement, humanitarian suffering, and the rise of extremist groups like the Islamic State." The territorial control of the Islamic State (IS) across parts of Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2019 added another layer of complexity to the regional security landscape, with the group temporarily establishing a self-proclaimed caliphate that implemented an extreme interpretation of Islamic governance (Gerges, 2019, p. 138) ^[14].

Regional Realignments and Emerging Blocs

The post-Arab spring period has witnessed significant realignments in regional alliances and the emergence of competing blocs. The traditional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has intensified, with both powers supporting opposing sides in conflicts across the region. As Sadjadpour (2022, p. 74) ^[41] notes, "Iran's support for non-state actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, various militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen has been a source of regional tension, though both countries engaged in dialogue aimed at de-escalation starting in 2021." A significant development has been the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states through the Abraham Accords signed in 2020. According to Guzansky and Marshall (2021, p. 39) ^[18], "The agreements establishing diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan marked a departure from the longstanding Arab consensus that normalization with Israel should be contingent on the resolution of the Palestinian issue". This realignment has been driven partly by shared concerns about Iran's regional influence and nuclear ambitions, creating a new axis in regional geopolitics.

Turkey has emerged as a more assertive regional player, intervening militarily in Syria and Libya and seeking to expand its influence across the region. Aydıntaşbaş (2021,

p. 51) ^[3] argues that "Turkey's assertive foreign policy under President Erdogan has aimed to position the country as an independent power center capable of projecting influence across the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Mediterranean, often bringing it into competition with traditional regional powers".

The Gulf States themselves have experienced internal divisions, most notably with the 2017-2021 blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, which temporarily fractured the Gulf Cooperation Council. Young (2022, p. 55) ^[50] observes that "the UAE has emerged as a particularly assertive regional power, pursuing an activist foreign policy that has included military interventions in Yemen and Libya, counterrevolutionary support in Egypt, and normalization with Israel".

The evolving role of external powers

The role of external powers in WANA has evolved significantly since the Arab Spring, contributing to a more complex and multipolar regional order. The United States, traditionally the predominant external power in the region, has shown signs of strategic retrenchment. As Stacey (2023, p. 42) ^[46] notes, "The perception of reducing U.S. commitment to the region, evident in the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the limited response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and the stated pivot to Asia, has created both challenges and opportunities for regional and global actors."

Russia has capitalized on this perception to enhance its influence in the region, particularly through its decisive military intervention in Syria, which proved crucial in preserving the Assad regime. According to Borshchevskaya (2021, p. 63) ^[7], "Russia's growing presence in the Middle East extends beyond its military intervention in Syria to include expanded diplomatic, economic, and defense ties with various countries in the region, including traditional U.S. allies such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey".

China's presence in WANA has grown significantly, primarily through economic engagement under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Fulton (2022, p. 47) ^[12] highlights that "Chinese investments in ports, railways, and energy infrastructure across the region, combined with its status as the largest buyer of Middle Eastern oil, have given Beijing substantial influence, though China has generally avoided direct involvement in regional conflicts".

These shifts have created a more complex geopolitical landscape in WANA, characterized by fluid alliances, multi-dimensional competitions, and overlapping spheres of influence. As Lynch (2023, p. 71) ^[29] observes, "The post-Arab Spring Middle East has become increasingly multipolar, with regional powers exercising greater agency and autonomy while navigating relationships with multiple global powers".

India's strategic interests in WANA energy security and economic interests

Energy security has been a cornerstone of India's strategic interests in WANA. As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India's energy demand has increased substantially, with imports covering approximately 85% of its oil needs and about 50% of its natural gas requirements (Kohli, 2021, p. 31) ^[23]. WANA, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Iran, and Iraq, has been India's primary source of hydrocarbon imports, making

the stability of these supplies vital for India's economic security.

According to Pradhan (2023, p. 76) ^[39], "WANA accounts for approximately 60% of India's oil imports and 90% of its gas imports, creating significant energy interdependence." This dependence has made India particularly vulnerable to regional instability and supply disruptions. As a result, India has pursued a strategy of supplier diversification within WANA while simultaneously developing strategic petroleum reserves and exploring alternative energy sources (Sinha, 2022, p. 83) ^[45].

Beyond energy, India has substantial economic interests in the region. WANA is an important market for Indian exports, particularly pharmaceuticals, food products, machinery, and services. Kumar (2022, p. 53) ^[26] notes that "the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are among India's top trading partners in the region, with bilateral trade volumes reaching substantial figures." The UAE, for instance, was India's third-largest trading partner globally in 2023, with bilateral trade exceeding \$72 billion (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India, 2023, p. 12). Investment flows between India and WANA have also increased significantly in recent years. According to Mishra (2023, p. 44) ^[34], "Gulf sovereign wealth funds have made substantial investments in various sectors of the Indian economy, including infrastructure, telecommunications, retail, and technology start-ups". Conversely, Indian companies have established a presence in WANA markets, particularly in sectors such as construction, information technology, healthcare, and hospitality (Shaikh, 2022, p. 87) ^[42].

Diaspora and Cultural Connections

The Indian diaspora in WANA, numbering over nine million people, is a crucial aspect of India's engagement with the region. The majority of this diaspora is concentrated in the GCC countries, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia hosting the largest Indian communities. Sharma (2021, p. 72) ^[43] observes that "this diaspora contributes substantially to India's economy through remittances, which amounted to approximately \$40 billion from the GCC countries alone in 2023".

The welfare and safety of this diaspora have been a priority for Indian policymakers, particularly during periods of regional instability. As Ghosh (2021, p. 62) notes, "India has conducted large-scale evacuation operations during crises, such as Operation Raahat from Yemen in 2015 and the evacuation from Libya in 2011 and 2014, demonstrating its commitment to protecting its citizens abroad and its logistical capabilities in crisis situations".

Beyond the contemporary diaspora, India has deep historical and cultural connections with WANA. According to Pasha (2020, p. 39) ^[37], "These ties date back centuries, encompassing trade, religious exchanges, and intellectual interactions". The influence of Persian and Arabic on Indian languages, particularly Urdu, the shared heritage of Sufi traditions, and the historical connections between Islamic and Hindu philosophical traditions all testify to these enduring cultural linkages (Thapar, 2022, p. 91) ^[48].

Security and Strategic Concerns

India's security interests in WANA are multifaceted and have evolved in response to changing regional dynamics. Maritime security in the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea is crucial for India, given its dependence on

seaborne trade and energy imports. Raja Mohan (2021, p. 58) ^[40] highlights that "the threat of piracy, particularly off the coast of Somalia, has prompted India to deploy naval vessels in the region and participate in international anti-piracy operations".

Terrorism and religious extremism have been significant security concerns for India, especially given the potential for spillover effects from conflicts in WANA. According to Taneja (2020, p. 76) ^[47], "The rise of the Islamic State and its ability to attract recruits from various countries, including India, underscored this threat." India has sought to enhance cooperation with WANA countries on counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, and combating extremist ideologies.

The geopolitical realignments in WANA, particularly the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states, have created new strategic opportunities for India. As Kumaraswamy (2022, p. 61) ^[26] observes, "As a country with strong ties to both Israel and Arab states, India is well-positioned to benefit from these emerging regional dynamics, which align with its own approach of maintaining balanced relationships with diverse partners".

India's diplomatic, economic, and security engagements in WANA diplomatic engagement with key regional powers

India has pursued a multi-faceted diplomatic approach to WANA, characterized by high-level exchanges, strategic partnerships, and balanced relationships across regional divides. This approach has been particularly evident in India's engagement with the Gulf States with which relations have been significantly upgraded in recent years.

India's relationship with the UAE exemplifies this trend. According to Bajpai (2023, p. 65) ^[5], "The exchange of visits between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the UAE's leadership has elevated bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, encompassing cooperation in areas ranging from trade and investment to defense and security." Similar high-level engagement has occurred with Saudi Arabia, with both countries announcing a Strategic Partnership Council in 2019 to coordinate on issues ranging from energy security to defense cooperation (Gupta, 2022, p. 41) ^[16].

India has also maintained a strong relationship with Iran, despite the challenges posed by international sanctions. As Pant (2023, p. 52) ^[35] notes, "The development of the Chabahar Port in Iran, which provides India with access to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan, has been a significant project in this relationship." India's ability to maintain constructive ties with Iran while simultaneously deepening relations with Iran's rivals in the Gulf and Israel demonstrates the efficacy of its balanced diplomatic approach.

With Israel, India has developed a robust partnership encompassing defense cooperation, counter-terrorism, agriculture, water management, and technology. According to Kumaraswamy (2023, p. 78) ^[27], "India-Israel relations have been transformed from a low-profile relationship constrained by India's traditional support for the Palestinian cause to a strategic partnership openly acknowledged and celebrated by both sides." At the same time, India has consistently supported the Palestinian cause in international forums, advocating for a two-state solution and providing developmental assistance to the Palestinian Authority

(Bhattacharya, 2022, p. 36) ^[6]. In North Africa, India has cultivated strong ties with Egypt, which has been a traditional partner since the Non-Aligned Movement era. Chaturvedi (2021, p. 59) ^[9] observes that "relations with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia have also been strengthened through trade, investment, and cooperation in areas such as phosphates, fertilizers, and information technology."

Economic Partnerships and Trade Relations

Economic engagement has been a cornerstone of India's approach to WANA. Trade volumes between India and the region have grown significantly, with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran being India's largest trading partners in the region (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India, 2023, p. 12).

The UAE has emerged as a particularly important economic partner for India. According to Menon (2023, p. 47) ^[31], "The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed between the two countries in 2022 aims to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030". The UAE has also become an important source of investment for India, with Emirati sovereign wealth funds investing in sectors ranging from infrastructure to digital technology (Shaikh, 2022, p. 87) ^[42].

India's economic ties with Saudi Arabia have also deepened significantly. Vaidyanathan (2023, p. 61) ^[49] notes that "Saudi investments in India's refining and petrochemical sectors and Indian companies establishing a presence in the Saudi market have created a more balanced economic relationship." The planned West Coast Refinery project in Maharashtra, involving Saudi Aramco and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), is a significant example of this economic partnership, though the project has faced delays due to land acquisition issues.

In the domain of energy security, India has diversified its supplier base within WANA while also seeking to insulate itself from regional volatility. According to Sinha (2022, p. 83) ^[45], "Long-term supply agreements with Gulf producers provide a degree of predictability, though India remains vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations and potential supply disruptions due to regional conflicts".

India has also explored opportunities in renewable energy with WANA countries. Mathur (2021, p. 53) ^[30] highlights that "the International Solar Alliance (ISA), an initiative co-founded by India, has attracted several WANA members, and there are growing opportunities for collaboration in solar and wind energy projects." This focus on renewable energy aligns with both India's climate commitments and the economic diversification strategies of several Gulf States.

Security Cooperation and Defense Ties

India's security engagement with WANA has evolved significantly, encompassing defense cooperation, counter-terrorism, and maritime security. According to Pant and Sharma (2023, p. 67) ^[35], "Defense ties with key Gulf states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have strengthened, with regular joint military exercises, training programs, and defense industrial cooperation".

Maritime security cooperation has been a priority, given India's dependence on the sea lanes traversing the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea. Raja Mohan (2021, p. 58) ^[40] notes that "the Indian Navy's regular deployments in these waters, participation in anti-piracy operations, and

bilateral and multilateral naval exercises with regional partners underscore this focus".

Counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing have become important aspects of India's security cooperation with WANA countries. Taneja (2020, p. 76) ^[47] observes that "the shared concern about extremist groups and ideologies has facilitated closer cooperation in this domain, particularly with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Israel".

India has also sought to enhance defense industrial cooperation with WANA countries. According to Singh (2022, p. 43) ^[44], "The export of Indian defense equipment to WANA has increased, and there are growing opportunities for joint production and technology transfer".

Israel has been a particularly important partner in this regard, supplying India with advanced defense systems and collaborating on joint development projects (Kumaraswamy 2023, p. 78) ^[27].

India's Role in Emerging Multilateral Frameworks **The I2U2 Grouping**

One of the most significant developments in India's multilateral engagement with WANA has been the formation of the I2U2 Group, comprising India, Israel, the UAE, and the United States. This quadrilateral format, established in 2021, represents a new approach to regional cooperation, bringing together countries with diverse geopolitical orientations but shared interests in specific areas of collaboration.

According to Kumaraswamy (2023, p. 78) ^[27], "The I2U2 Group focuses on joint investments and initiatives in water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security, leveraging the complementary strengths of its members." The grouping has already announced concrete projects, including UAE investments in food parks in India with Israeli technology and U.S. private sector expertise, and a hybrid renewable energy project in Gujarat. Gupta (2023, p. 53) ^[17] argues that "the I2U2 framework represents an innovative approach to regional cooperation that transcends traditional blocs and alignments, reflecting the more fluid and issue-based multilateralism emerging in the post-Arab spring context". For India, this grouping provides an opportunity to deepen its engagement with key partners in WANA while addressing practical challenges in areas such as food security, clean energy, and technological innovation.

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

Another significant multilateral initiative involving India and WANA countries is the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC), announced in 2023. This ambitious connectivity project aims to enhance trade and investment flows between India, the Gulf, and Europe through a network of shipping, rail, and road links.

Gupta (2023, p. 53) ^[17] notes that "the IMEEC represents a strategic response to China's Belt and Road Initiative, offering alternative connectivity options that align with democratic values and transparent financing mechanisms." The corridor involves multiple WANA countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, creating new avenues for regional integration and economic cooperation.

For India, the IMEEC offers several strategic advantages. According to Menon (2023, p. 47) ^[31], "The corridor would reduce transportation costs and time for Indian exports to Europe, enhance energy security through more efficient supply routes, and strengthen India's position in regional

value chains". The project also aligns with India's broader vision of enhancing connectivity with its extended neighborhood and building resilient supply chains.

Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region

India has also engaged with WANA countries through frameworks focused on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), where their security and economic interests intersect. As Raja Mohan (2021, p. 58) ^[40] observes, "The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) have provided platforms for dialogue and cooperation on maritime security, blue economy, and disaster management".

Several WANA countries, including Iran, the UAE, Yemen, and Egypt (through its Red Sea coast), are Indian Ocean littoral states and participate in these regional forums. According to Singh (2022, p. 43) ^[44], "India's focus on maritime security cooperation with these countries has gained greater urgency given the increasing competition in the Indian Ocean and the critical importance of sea lanes of communication for energy security and trade".

The growing presence of external powers in the Indian Ocean, particularly China's expanded naval activities and establishment of a military base in Djibouti, has added a strategic dimension to India's maritime cooperation with WANA countries. Raja Mohan (2021, p. 58) ^[40] argues that "India's maritime engagement with friendly WANA states serves as a counterbalance to China's growing influence in the region and helps protect critical maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb".

Implications for the global order

WANA in the evolving global power dynamics

The turmoil and transition in WANA have significant implications for the global order, particularly given the region's strategic location, energy resources, and the involvement of multiple global powers. According to Karsh *et al.* (2020, p. 15) ^[21], "The region has become a theater for great power competition, with the United States, Russia, and increasingly China pursuing their interests and influence".

The perceived reduction in U.S. commitment to the region has created both challenges and opportunities for regional and global actors. Stacey (2023, p. 42) ^[46] notes that "Russia has capitalized on this perception to enhance its influence in the region, particularly through its decisive military intervention in Syria and its expanding diplomatic, economic, and defense ties with various WANA countries". China's presence in WANA has grown significantly, primarily through economic engagement under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). According to Fulton (2022, p. 47) ^[12], "Chinese investments in ports, railways, and energy infrastructure across the region, combined with its status as the largest buyer of Middle Eastern oil, have given Beijing substantial influence, though China has generally avoided direct involvement in regional conflicts".

These developments have created a more multipolar regional order in WANA, with implications for global power dynamics. Lynch (2023, p. 71) ^[29] argues that "the ability of regional powers to diversify their partnerships, playing different global powers against each other, has enhanced their strategic autonomy and bargaining power".

India's role as a balancing power

In this evolving regional and global context, India has

positioned itself as a balancing power in WANA. According to Ganguly (2021, p. 47) ^[13], "India's policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment allows it to maintain constructive relationships with competing powers in the region while avoiding entanglement in their rivalries".

India's economic size, growing military capabilities, democratic credentials, and historical connections with WANA make it an attractive partner for countries in the region seeking to diversify their strategic relationships beyond the United States, China, and Russia. Menon (2023, p. 47) ^[31] observes that "as power dynamics in the region continue to evolve, India's role as a stabilizing influence and a bridge between different regional blocs is likely to grow in importance".

India's approach to WANA also reflects its broader vision of a multipolar world order in which regional powers have agency and autonomy. Bajpai (2023, p. 65) ^[5] argues that "by supporting regional institutions and initiatives that enhance cooperation and stability, India contributes to a more balanced and inclusive global governance architecture".

Challenges and opportunities for India's strategic posture

Despite the success of India's balanced approach, significant challenges remain in navigating the complex geopolitical landscape of post-Arab Spring WANA. According to Pant (2023, p. 52) ^[35], "India's ability to maintain equilibrium in its relationships with competing regional powers may be tested as rivalries intensify and pressure increases to take sides on contentious issues." The ongoing conflicts in Syria,

Yemen, and Libya, as well as tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear program and its regional activities, present challenges for India's policy of multi-alignment. Sadjadpour (2022, p. 74) ^[41] notes that "as the United States and its allies increase pressure on Iran, India may face difficult choices in balancing its relations with Tehran against its partnerships with Washington and Gulf Arab states".

Another challenge relates to the protection of the Indian diaspora in times of regional instability. As Sharma (2021, p. 72) ^[43] observes, "The safety and welfare of the nine million-strong Indian community in WANA remains a priority for Indian policymakers, requiring robust evacuation capabilities and diplomatic engagement with host governments".

Despite these challenges, India's recalibrated strategic posture offers significant opportunities to advance its interests in WANA. Kumar (2022, p. 53) argues that "India's balanced approach positions it well to benefit from economic opportunities across the region, from energy partnerships with Gulf states to technology cooperation with Israel and infrastructure projects with Iran".

Moreover, India's participation in emerging multilateral frameworks such as I2U2 and IMEEC provides avenues to shape regional connectivity and economic integration in ways that align with its interests. According to Gupta (2023, p. 53) ^[17], "These initiatives offer India platforms to enhance its strategic presence in WANA while contributing to regional stability and prosperity". Key Aspects of India's Post-Arab Spring Strategic Posture in WANA is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Key Aspects of India's Post-Arab Spring Strategic Posture in WANA

Strategic Dimension	Key Elements	Outcomes & Initiatives	Future Trajectory
Energy Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WANA accounts for 60% of India's oil imports and 90% of gas imports, • Supplier diversification strategy, • Long-term supply agreements, • Strategic petroleum reserves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Coast Refinery project with Saudi Aramco & ADNOC • Growing focus on renewable energy partnerships • International Solar Alliance (ISA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced energy interdependence • Diversification toward green energy • Joint ventures in renewable technology
Economic Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding bilateral trade. • Investment partnerships. • Market access for Indian exports. • Gulf investments in Indian economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UAE-India CEPA (2022) • \$72+ billion bilateral trade with UAE (2023) • Gulf • SWF investments in Indian infrastructure, tech startups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projected increase in bilateral trade • Deeper integration into regional value chains • Focus on digital economy, healthcare, food security
Diaspora Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9+ million Indians in WANA. \$40+ billion in annual • Remittances • Welfare and protection policies • Evacuation capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operation Raahat (Yemen, 2015) • Evacuations from Libya (2011, 2014) • Cultural and educational exchanges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced consular services • Skill development programs • Protection mechanisms during regional crises
Security Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime security in Indian Ocean • Counter-terrorism collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint naval exercises • Military training programs • Defense industrial cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded maritime security cooperation • Joint defense production
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defense partnerships • Intelligence sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter-extremism initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cybersecurity partnerships
Diplomatic Balancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic autonomy policy • Multi-alignment strategy • Balanced relations across regional divides • High-level bilateral exchanges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with UAE • Strategic Partnership Council with Saudi Arabia • Chabahar Port project with Iran • Defense ties with Israel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued policy of strategic equilibrium • Management of competing relationships • Pursuit of balanced stance on regional conflicts
Multilateral Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in new regional frameworks • Promotion of inclusive cooperation models • Focus on practical collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I2U2 Group (India, Israel, UAE, US) • India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) • Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) • Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper engagement with emerging frameworks • Initiatives in food security, water management • Infrastructure and connectivity projects

Conclusion

India's recalibration of its strategic posture in response to the geopolitical shifts in post-Arab Spring WANA represents a pragmatic adaptation to a more complex and fluid regional environment. By pursuing a policy of multi-alignment, India has successfully navigated competing regional blocs while advancing its core interests in energy security, economic partnerships, diaspora welfare, and counterterrorism.

Looking ahead, several trends are likely to shape the future of India's strategic posture in WANA. First, economic ties are expected to deepen further, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy, digital technology, infrastructure, and healthcare. According to Kumar (2022, p. 53) ^[24], "The UAE-India CEPA provides a template for similar agreements with other WANA countries, potentially leading to a more integrated economic relationship".

Second, security cooperation is likely to expand, encompassing traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Pant and Sharma (2023, p. 67) ^[35] note that "maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, and defense industrial cooperation are areas with significant potential for enhanced collaboration between India and WANA partners".

Third, the imperative of energy transition and climate action presents both challenges and opportunities for India-WANA relations. As Mathur (2021, p. 53) ^[30] observes, "Collaboration on renewable energy, green hydrogen, and sustainable development could become increasingly important as both India and Gulf states seek to diversify their energy profiles and reduce carbon emissions".

Fourth, the evolving regional order in WANA, characterized by shifting alliances and emerging multilateral frameworks, offers India opportunities to enhance its strategic position and influence. According to Bajpai (2023, p. 65) ^[5], "By actively engaging with these new initiatives while maintaining balanced relationships across regional divides, India can contribute to a more stable and inclusive regional order".

Finally, the shared challenges of terrorism, extremism, and radicalization are likely to remain significant factors in India-WANA relations. Taneja (2020, p. 76) ^[47] argues that "enhanced cooperation in countering these threats, through intelligence sharing, capacity building, and addressing root causes, will be crucial for regional and global security".

As the global order becomes increasingly multipolar, India's recalibrated strategic posture in WANA demonstrates the effectiveness of a balanced and pragmatic approach to regional engagement. By avoiding rigid alignments while pursuing its national interests through diverse partnerships, India has positioned itself as an important stakeholder in the future trajectory of this vital region. As Raja Mohan (2021, p. 58) ^[40] concludes, "India's approach to WANA represents a successful model of strategic adaptation in an era of geopolitical flux, offering valuable lessons for its broader foreign policy in a changing world order".

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