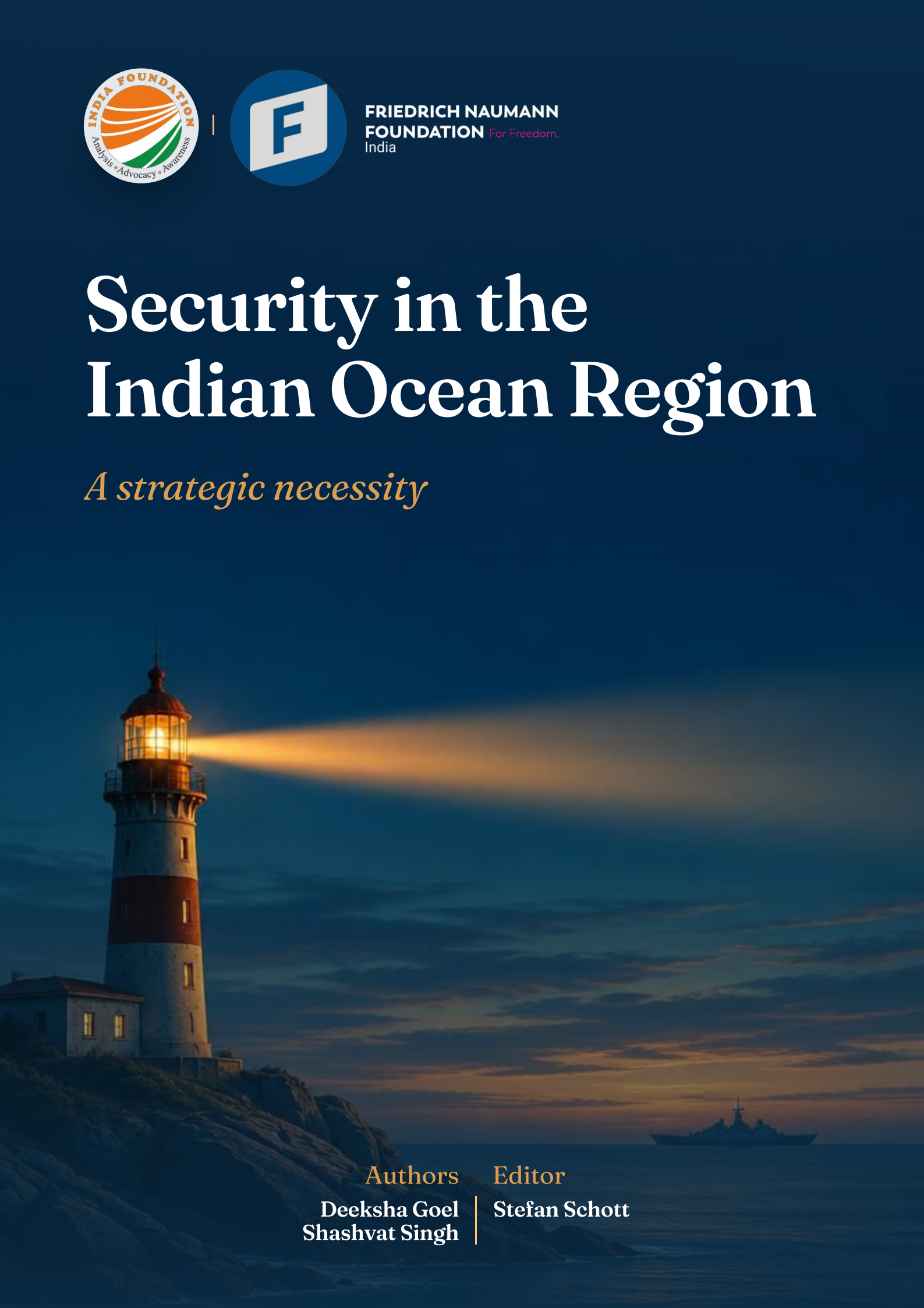
FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION For Freedom. India

Security in the Indian Ocean Region

A strategic necessity



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Executive Summary

The blockage of the Strait of Hormuz sent an economic shock worldwide. Global oil prices surged by 24 per cent, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) lowered its forecast for global growth in 2026 to 3.1 per cent. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) expects world merchandise trade growth to slow from 4.7 per cent in 2025 to between 1.5 and 2.5 per cent in 2026, all of which is due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Europe, despite its distance from the crisis, faces weaker economic growth, higher energy costs and energy shortages, mainly because of the steep increase in oil and gas prices. India and other South Asian countries are hit even harder, as they depend even more heavily on energy imports from the Gulf region. The crisis is a stark reminder of how much the global economy and the welfare of people depend on keeping vital free trade routes through the Indian Ocean open, secure and uninterrupted.

In fact, Hormuz is just one of several strategic chokepoints in the Indian Ocean. There are other chokepoints which include Bab-el-Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca and the Cape of Good Hope, and any major disruption there could trigger similarly significant economic and supply-chain consequences worldwide.

In general, the Indian Ocean is a vital maritime link between Europe and Asia and one of the world's most important corridors for global trade. It carries approximately 30 per cent of global containerised cargo, while around two-third of the world's maritime oil trade passes through the wider Indian Ocean region. This strategic importance has made it an increasingly contested maritime space.

Major powers are strengthening their military capabilities to protect their strategic interests in the Indian Ocean. China and India, in particular, are expanding their naval forces and investing in maritime defence infrastructure. Other powers, including the United States, the United Kingdom and France, also maintain a military presence in the region to protect their interests. At the same time, non-state actors, including the Houthis in Yemen and pirate groups from Somalia, threaten vital maritime routes, adding to the region's security challenges.

This paper analyses the relevance of the Indian Ocean region for world trade as well as the security threats to its maritime trade routes. It provides an overview of the most important players in the region and explains their strategic measures.

Based on this analysis, the paper examines the measures needed to safeguard freedom of navigation and to ensure an uninterrupted flow of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. It explores what role Europe can play in addressing these challenges and what opportunities exist for closer India–Europe cooperation.



CHAPTER

01

Indian Ocean in World Affairs

SECURITY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

Geographically, the Indian Ocean is the third-largest ocean in the world and, significantly, the only one named after a country. The ocean comprises the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, as one sails from West to East. The ocean is bounded by Africa to the west, Southeast Asia and Australia to the east, while India and West Asia mark the northern border. With 30 littoral countries, the IOR is home to over one-third of the global population. Not just the coast and waters, but the monsoon winds too have been integral to the history of the region, guiding traders and pilgrims, and carrying ideas from the Indian subcontinent and Arabian Peninsula. In this region, there is history, there is commerce and there are stakes that the world cannot ignore.

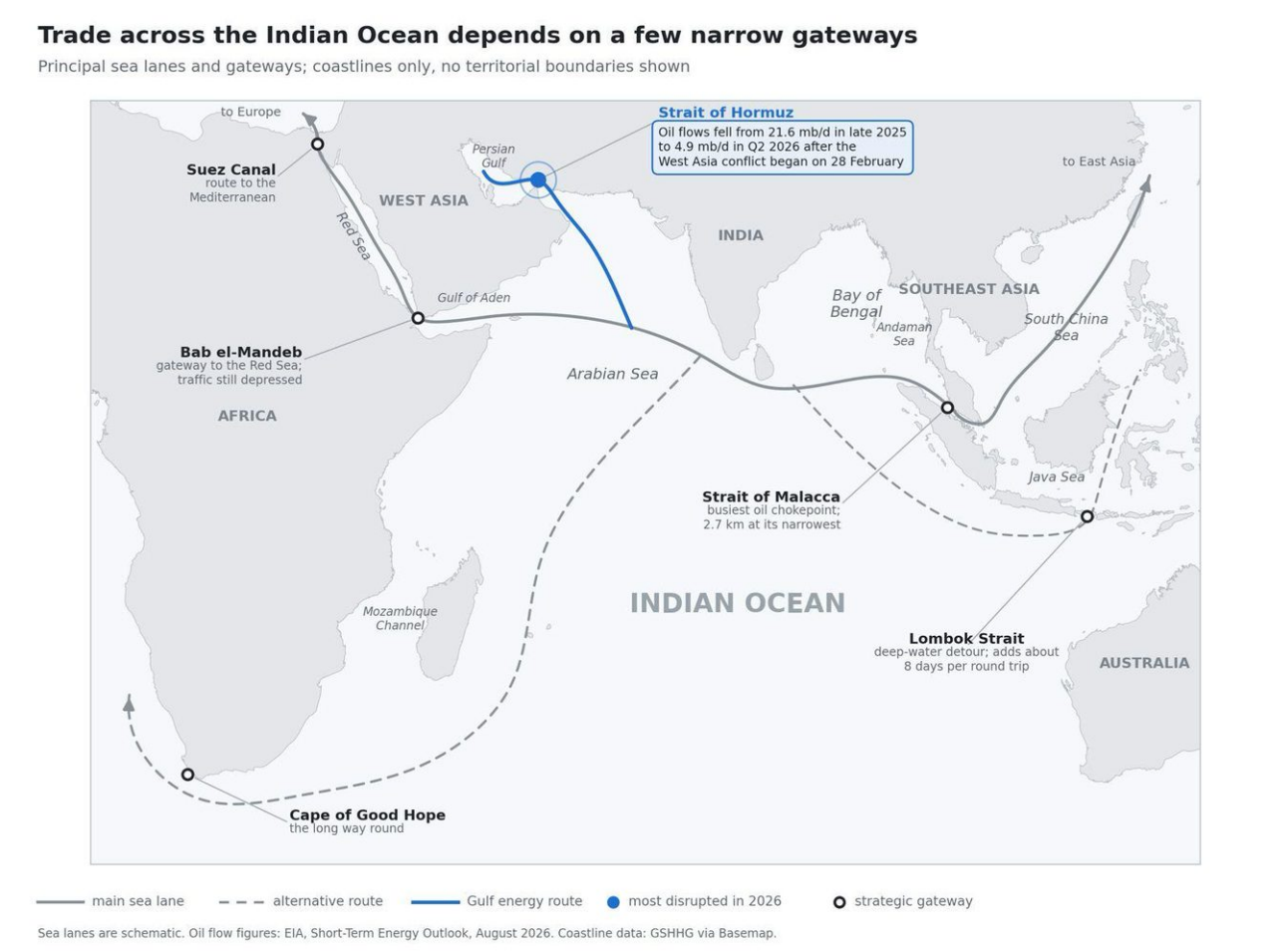


Figure 1: The Indian Ocean Region: principal sea lanes and gateways.
Map for representation purposes only and doesn't depict international boundaries of India accurately

The Indian Ocean is critical to both Asia and Europe, as a significant part of both continents' economic life passes through it. Blockages at narrow exit points could trigger a full-blown economic emergency.

In 2026, this point was further reinforced when the West Asia conflict broke out on 28 February. Consequently, oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz fell from 21.6 million barrels a day (mb/d) in late 2025 to 4.9 mb/d in Q2 of 2026[1]. UNCTAD's assessment anticipates a

1 U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), "Global Energy Security Data", *Short-Term Energy Outlook*, released 12 August 2026, Table 4.

slowdown in world merchandise trade growth from 4.7 per cent in 2025 to between 1.5 and 2.5 per cent in 2026, largely due to the Strait of Hormuz crisis[2]. The Red Sea too remains adversely affected.

1.1 Maritime Gateways

Over 80 per cent of world merchandise trade is facilitated by the shipping industry. In 2024, maritime trade volumes reached 12,720 million tonnes[3]. A majority share of this trade moves through the waters of the Indian Ocean. Estimates situate that half of the world's trade and two-thirds of its oil passage happens through the Indian Ocean[4].

The Indian Ocean has four gateways at its edges, each of immense importance for world commerce. To the northwest lies the Strait of Hormuz; at the mouth of the Red Sea lies the Bab el-Mandeb; and on the eastern side there is the Strait of Malacca. When these gateways are threatened, the Cape of Good Hope, the long way round, comes to the rescue. In the first half of 2025, the Strait of Malacca carried 23.2 million barrels of oil per day, about 29 per cent of all oil traded by sea. The Strait of Hormuz carried 20.9 million barrels per day, about a quarter of seaborne oil and a fifth of global oil consumption. Another 4.2 million barrels per day passed through the Bab el-Mandeb[5].

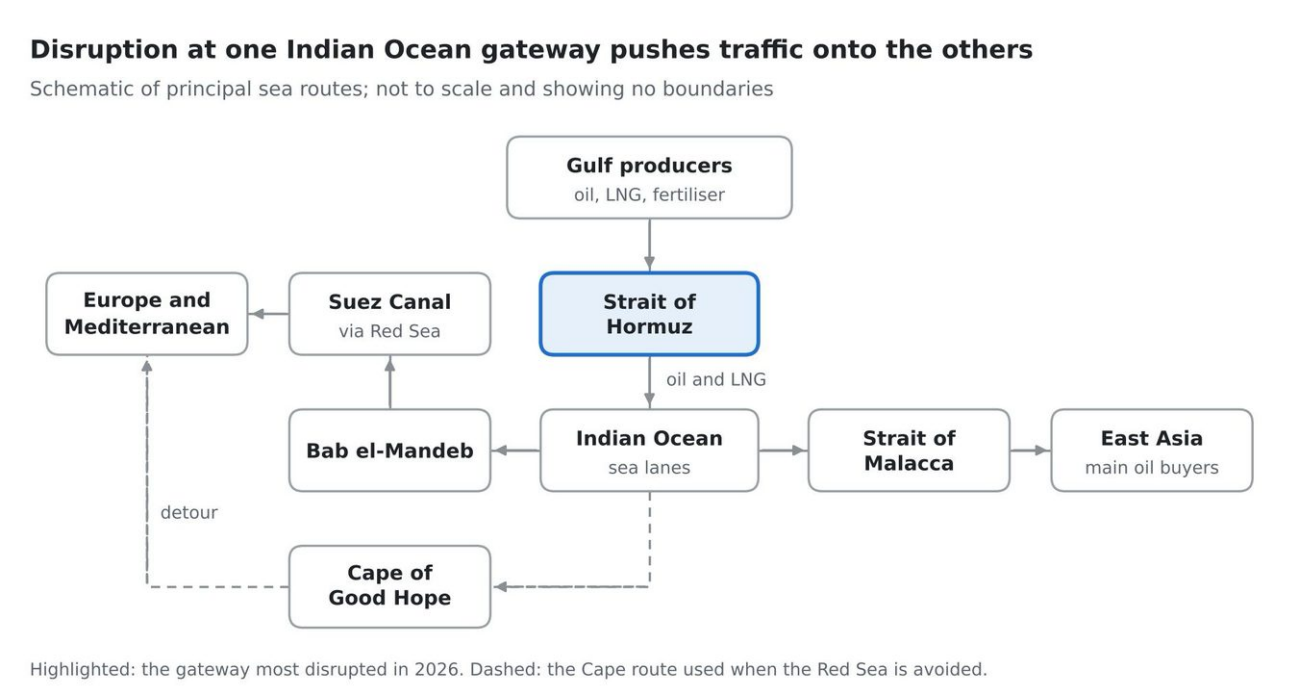


Figure 2: Schematic of Indian Ocean gateways, drawn for this report. Not to scale; no territorial boundaries are shown

2 UNCTAD, "Hormuz disruption deepens global economic strain across trade, prices and finance", second rapid assessment, April 2026.

3 UNCTAD, *Review of Maritime Transport 2025: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters* (Geneva, 24 September 2025), as presented at the UNCTAD press conference and summarised by the Institute of Marine Surveying.

4 Eva Pejsova, "Scrambling for the Indian Ocean", EU Institute for Security Studies, 2016

5 US Energy Information Administration, "World Oil Transit Chokepoints", updated 3 March 2026

The movement of traffic that happens through these gateways is asymmetric. Asia receives energy that is moving from the west. Europe gets manufactured products flowing from the east. In 2024, India, China, Japan and South Korea took 69 per cent of the crude oil and condensate passing through the Strait of Hormuz[6].

It is also important to mention the economic weight of the economies around the Indian Ocean. A NITI Aayog working paper shows that, in 2023, the region's 24 core economies together accounted for 11.1 per cent of world GDP alongside 14.1 per cent of the global goods trade and a 13 per cent share in commercial services trade. These countries also received one-third of global net FDI inflows, with Singapore alone getting 13.4 per cent of the pie[7].

1.2 Trade Flows

Two gateways to the Indian Ocean have been under severe stress. The Red Sea problem has now entered its third year. As of May 2025, tonnage transiting the Suez Canal was about 70 per cent below the 2023 average, as per UNCTAD's 2025 Review of Maritime Transport. The main cause of this decline is being attributed to attacks on commercial vessels by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the aftermath of the conflict in October 2023. The Review went on to describe this disruption as the most sustained since the closure of the Suez Canal that followed the 1967 Six-Day War and lasted until 1975[8].

The Strait of Hormuz has been hit much harder. As per UNCTAD estimates, daily transits fell to an average of six vessels in March 2026 from an average of 129 in February 2026, almost a 95 per cent collapse[9]. By late March, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) estimated that about 2,000 ships and nearly 20,000 seafarers were stranded west of the strait. In July, the IMO Secretary-General reported that about 6,000 seafarers remained trapped in the region[10]. The situation continues to remain tense, and traffic movement via the strait is still far below normal. Even in early October, the threat to commercial shipping was still rated as severe by Lloyd's List Intelligence[11].

The impact is evident on the eastern side as well. Malacca has emerged as the busiest oil chokepoint globally, carrying an average of 23.6 mb/d in 2025[12]. As per Malaysia's Marine Department, more than 102,500 transits occurred in 2025[13]. Because much of the oil passing through Malacca is loaded in the Gulf, the closure of Hormuz has pulled Malacca's flows down too. In the second quarter of 2026, as flows through Hormuz collapsed, Malacca's oil flows fell to 16.6 mb/d[14].

6 EIA, "Amid regional conflict, the Strait of Hormuz remains critical oil chokepoint", *Today in Energy*, 16 June 2025.

7 Arvind Virmani and Shruti Sabharwal, *Gondwana: Economic Integration of Indian Ocean Region*, NITI Working Paper (New Delhi: NITI Aayog, December 2025), Table 3 and Section 6.2. Authors' calculations from World Development Indicators. "Core IOR" is the paper's grouping of 24 economies: IORA members plus the GCC, excluding Somalia and Yemen. The paper states that its views are the authors' own, not NITI Aayog's. https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2026-02/Gondwana-Economic-Integration-of-Indian-Ocean-Region.pdf

8 UNCTAD, op. cit. (n. 3), Foreword; May 2025 figure as summarised by the Institute of Marine Surveying.

9 UNCTAD, op. cit. (n. 2), based on Clarksons Research data.

10 IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez, statement to the 137th session of the IMO Council, 8 July 2026.

11 Lloyd's List Intelligence, "Strait of Hormuz Brief: 8 October 2026".

12 EIA, op. cit. (n. 1), Tables 2 and 3; 2025 averages calculated by the authors from EIA's quarterly figures.

13 Malaysian Marine Department data, reported by Reuters and reproduced by GMA News.

14 EIA, op. cit. (n. 1).

The Cape of Good Hope has absorbed a part of the shock triggered by the West Asia crisis, with LNG flows around the Cape in Q2 2026 roughly double those of Q1.[15]

1.3 Energy Routes

In 2025, about 21.2 mb/d of crude oil and refined products transited through the Strait of Hormuz. This is about one-fourth of global seaborne oil trade, and about 80 per cent of it goes to Asia. One-fifth of global LNG trade also happens via Hormuz, around 112 billion cubic metres a year[16].

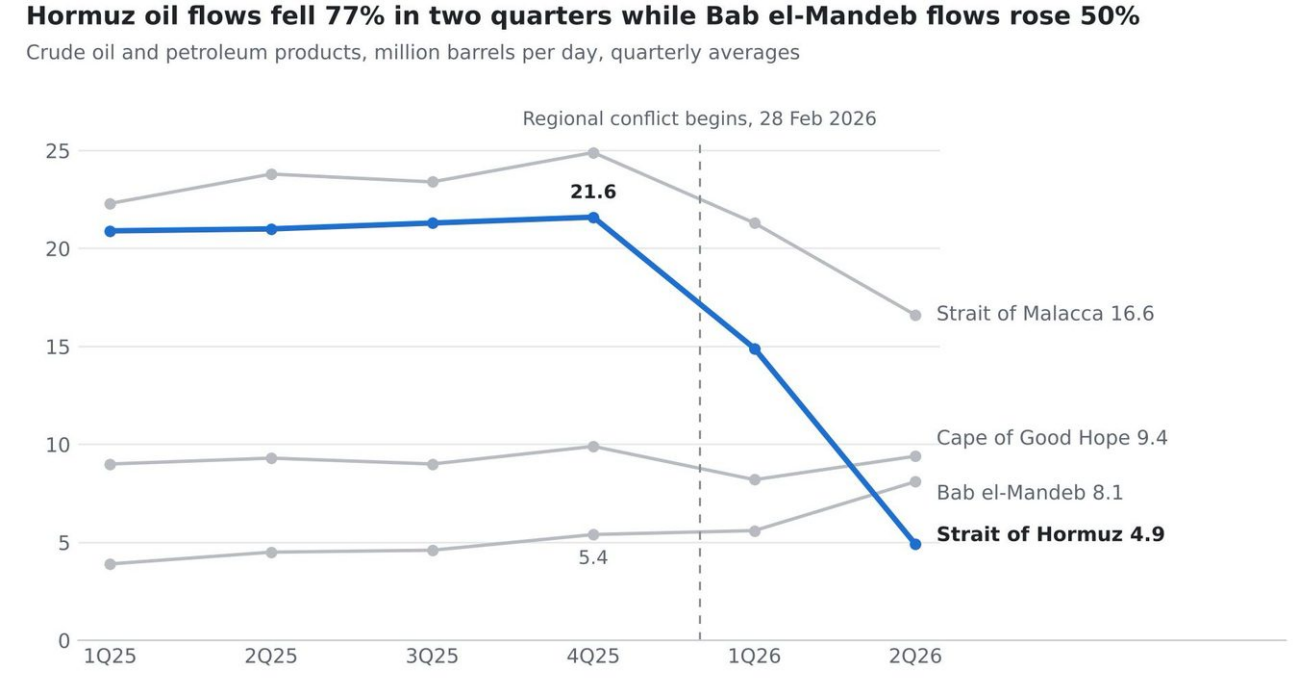


Figure 3. Oil flows through selected chokepoints, 1Q 2025 to 2Q 2026. Source: EIA, Short-Term Energy Outlook, August 2026, Table 2 (Vortexa tanker tracking). 2026 Hormuz figures are subject to revision.

The impact of the Hormuz crisis is evident in Figure 3. Due to the precarious situation, Saudi Arabia resorted to sending its crude overland to its ports in the Red Sea, a route already under threat. Oil flows through Bab el-Mandeb rose by 50 per cent, from 5.4 mb/d in Q4 2025 to 8.1 mb/d in Q2 2026. LNG flows through Hormuz fell from 10.5 to 0.8 billion cubic feet a day after the Hormuz crisis erupted[17].

As far as LNG is concerned, Asia and Europe have been exposed differently. In 2025, about 27 per cent of Asia's and 7 per cent of Europe's LNG imports came through the Strait of Hormuz[18]. This is why Europe feels the shock more when the Suez route gets disrupted. Fertilisers are another channel of exposure. Close to 16 million tonnes of fertiliser, about one-third of global seaborne fertiliser trade, pass through the Strait of Hormuz. UNCTAD has warned that a

15 EIA, op. cit. (n. 1), Table 10 (LNG transported around the Cape of Good Hope).

16 International Energy Agency (IEA), "Strait of Hormuz" factsheet, accessed 14 October 2026.

17 EIA, op. cit. (n. 1), Tables 4 and 6.

18 IEA, op. cit. (n. 16).

prolonged Hormuz crisis could squeeze supplies to some of the vulnerable importing nations[19].

The macroeconomic impact of the West Asia conflict has already become apparent. In April, the IMF slashed its 2026 global growth forecast to 3.1 per cent. It added that, had the conflict not erupted, the forecast would have been 3.4 per cent, and warned that a longer disruption could bring growth down to 2.5 per cent, or to about 2 per cent in a severe scenario[20].

An important point to note is that most of the IOR's crude trade runs outward. In 2023, 86.4 per cent of core Indian Ocean crude exports by value went to buyers outside the region, and 58.5 per cent of the group's crude imports came from outside it[21]. Therefore, for the region's producers, demand beyond the ocean and the routes that reach it matter more than demand within it.

1.4 Undersea Cables

While trade and energy provide the visible layer of economic flow through the Indian Ocean, beneath them lie hundreds of thousands of kilometres of undersea cables carrying over 99% of global data traffic[22]. Some of the most critical cables rest underneath the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, with about 15 cables passing through the Bab el-Mandeb[23]. The undersea cables are arteries of communication and data flow between Europe and Asia, with estimates suggesting they carry about 90% of data traffic between the two continents[24].

The risk to such critical infrastructure is no longer confined to espionage or theoretical scenario planning. In 2024, cable damage in the Red Sea affected over 25% of the total data traffic flowing through the region[25]. Then, in September 2025, damage to cables including SEA-ME-WE-4 and IMEWE caused lags in internet speed across Asia and the Middle East[26].

1.5 Blue Economy

Significant for security, connectivity and regionalism, the ocean is also a source of livelihood for small island developing states (SIDS). Its fisheries are a source of sustenance to millions of dependent communities, while the depths hold polymetallic nodules and sulphides, both of which are becoming more valuable with the growing importance of critical minerals.

1.6 Implications for India and Europe

Firstly, the gateways of the Indian Ocean function as a single system. So, pressure on one is felt at the others. The region therefore needs to be considered in its entirety for supply chain resilience. A siloed strategy for Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and Malacca miscalculates risk and may not work in the longer run.

19 UNCTAD, "Hormuz shipping disruptions raise risks for energy, fertilisers and vulnerable economies", 10 March 2026, and the accompanying rapid analysis.

20 IMF, World Economic Outlook, April 2026, as reported by Reuters, 14 April 2026 and AFP. In the IMF's severe scenario, 2026 growth falls to about 2 per cent.

21 Virmani and Sabharwal, op. cit. (n. 7), Table 8, using UN Comtrade data via WITS.

22 Gulf News, Red Sea cable chaos: Why the Internet didn't go dark, September 2025.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Associated Press, Underwater data cables in Red Sea cut as Houthi attacks continue in the vital waterway, 4 March 2024.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Gulf News, op. cit. (n. 22).

Secondly, India and the EU both have high stakes in the region, though in different forms. India is dependent on the Gulf to meet much of its energy needs and on the sea lanes for nearly all its trade by volume. It also provides over 300,000 seafarers, which is about 12 per cent of the global workforce. Much of this manpower has been caught up in the present crisis[27]. Europe's exposure is indirect, running through energy prices, the Suez route and the data link to Asia.

27 BIMCO–ICS Seafarer Workforce Report 2026: 311,936 Indian seafarers, 12.16% of the global workforce (reported by The Week, 29 July 2026).



CHAPTER

02

Vulnerable Points in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR): An Assessment of Their Importance for Global Trade, Energy Security and Supply Chain Resilience

Trade in the Indian Ocean is dependent on a few gateways existing at its edges. This chapter assesses the vulnerability of each gateway along with its alternatives and examines the impact of recent disruptions on trade, energy supply and supply chains.

We define a vulnerable point in this context as a narrow passage or an infrastructure corridor, where a single event could disrupt a large share of trade and for which there are few practical alternatives. Besides the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and the Strait of Malacca, the chapter covers the Suez Canal, the pathway through the Cape of Good Hope and deep-water channels through Indonesia, as well as submarine cables and satellite navigation.

Comparison of Chokepoints

Passage	Narrowest point	Oil flow, 2025 (mb/d)	Main alternative	Limits of the alternative
Strait of Hormuz	39 km	21.2	Saudi East-West and UAE Habshan–Fujairah pipelines	Spare capacity about 3.5–5.5 mb/d; no route for LNG
Strait of Malacca	2.7 km (Phillips Channel)	23.6	Lombok–Makassar route	About 8 extra days per round trip; Sunda too shallow for large tankers
Bab el-Mandeb	29 km	4.6	Cape of Good Hope	About 15 extra days, Arabian Sea–Europe, if Suez and SUMED (Suez–Mediterranean) pipeline are also closed
Cape of Good Hope	Open ocean	9.3	None required	Longest route; higher fuel and charter costs

Table 1. Principal passages in the Indian Ocean system. Oil flows are 2025 averages calculated from EIA quarterly data. Widths from the International Energy Agency (IEA) and Reuters. Alternatives from the IEA, EIA and S&P Global Commodity Insights.

2.1 Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz has the fewest substitutes in the IOR. In 2025, nearly 15 mb/d of crude oil came through it, which is about 34 per cent of global crude trade. India and China together took 44 per cent of it[28]. The strait holds greater importance for gas transit. Qatar and the UAE ship almost all their LNG through it, while India, Bangladesh and Pakistan import almost two-thirds of their LNG this way[29]. Since the conflict broke out on 28 February 2026, oil flows through the strait have decreased to 14.9 mb/d in Q1 and 4.9 mb/d in Q2. LNG flows have nearly stopped, dropping from 10.5 billion cubic feet a day in late 2025 to 0.8 in Q2 2026[30]. The situation in October 2026 remains grim, with Lloyd's List Intelligence still rating the threat to

28 IEA, op. cit. (n. 16).

29 IEA, op. cit. (n. 16).

30 EIA, op. cit. (n. 1).

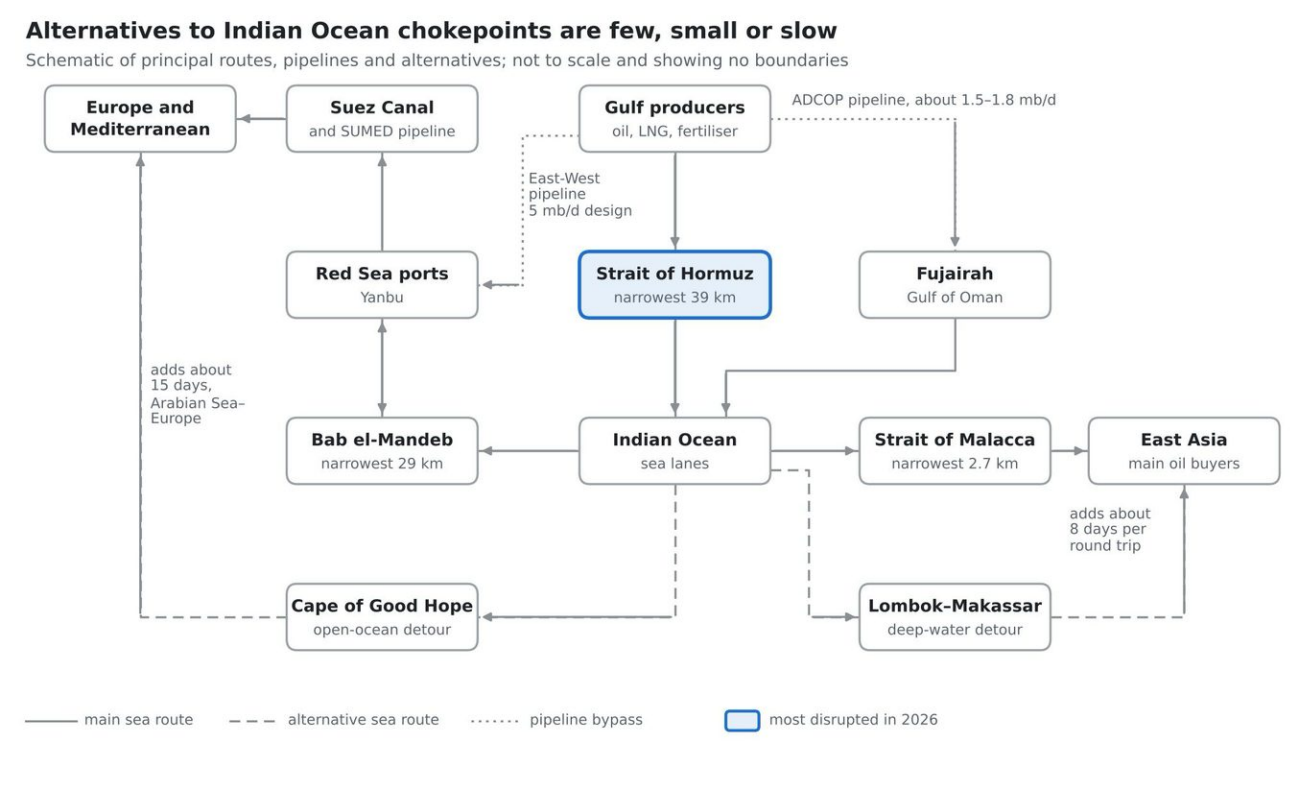


Figure 4. Principal routes, bypass pipelines and alternatives. Schematic drawn for this report; not to scale and showing no territorial boundaries. Any cartographic version should use the Survey of India base map.

commercial shipping as "severe"[31].

Coming to alternatives to the Strait of Hormuz, according to IEA estimates, spare capacity on the Saudi East-West and UAE Habshan–Fujairah pipelines is about 3.5–5.5 mb/d. The IEA goes on to add that rerouting at scale has not been robustly evaluated and Iran's Jask terminal cannot be considered a viable outlet. When it comes to LNG, there are no alternative export routes[32]. The pipeline too is not devoid of the exposure to attacks by the Houthis and has faced disruptions in the past.

2.2 Bab el-Mandeb, the Red Sea and Suez

At its narrowest, Bab el-Mandeb is only 29 km wide. Perim Island divides this strait into separate inbound and outbound channels[33]. It is the southern gateway to the Red Sea and, through the Suez Canal, to Europe. As noted in the previous chapter, the Houthi attacks on shipping since late 2023 pushed carriers around Africa. By February 2024, UNCTAD reported that transits through Suez were 42 per cent below their peak and weekly container transits were down 67 per cent[34]. The crisis spread costs across the system, with container tonne-miles rising an estimated 17 per cent in 2024 due to voyages becoming longer. The Shanghai Containerised Freight Index averaged about 149 per cent higher than in

31 Lloyd's List Intelligence, op. cit. (n. 11).

32 IEA, op. cit. (n. 16).

33 Reuters, "Why is the Bab el-Mandeb Strait so important?", 10 September 2026, as republished by *American Journal of Transportation*.

34 UNCTAD, "Disruptions in key global shipping routes: Suez Canal, Panama Canal and Black Sea signal unprecedented challenges for global trade", press release, 22 February 2024.

2023[35]. The environmental cost is also high: UNCTAD estimated that greenhouse gas emissions on a Singapore-Rotterdam round trip could rise by up to 70 per cent on the longer route[36]. Egypt has absorbed a large share of the loss, with the IMF projecting the Suez Canal revenue in FY 2024-25 to be USD 3.6 billion, down from USD 6.6 billion in FY 2023-24[37].

The year 2026 saw the Red Sea taking on a new role as the outlet for the Saudi crude diverted from Hormuz. The oil transit through the Bab el-Mandeb rose about 75 per cent above its 2025 average (Chapter 1, Figure 3)[38]. Despite remaining exposed, the route gained importance. However, in July 2026, the Houthis declared a naval blockade against Saudi Arabia[39].

2.3 Strait of Malacca and the Eastern Approaches

Chapter 1 noted that Malacca is the largest oil chokepoint by volume. At the Phillips Channel off Singapore, the passage narrows to 2.7 km[40]. In each quarter of 2025, it also carried between 8.9 and 10.1 billion cubic feet a day of LNG[41]. Since most of its oil is loaded in the Gulf, it also inherits much of the Gulf's exposure. The alternative passages through Indonesia are costly: the Sunda Strait is too narrow and shallow for large tankers to navigate, and routing through Lombok and Makassar adds about eight days per round trip. According to the think tank E3G, this could take roughly one-sixth of global tanker capacity out of use[42].

The strait is relatively free of crime. The International Maritime Bureau recorded only four boardings in the Singapore Strait between April and June 2026[43]. However, the legal regime has garnered fresh attention. In April 2026, Indonesia's finance minister floated a levy on ships transiting the strait, then backed away after Singapore said that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) guarantees transit passage and that this right cannot be made subject to a toll[44]. Later, on 12 October 2026, 60 countries, including EU member states, Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom, backed a declaration opposing tolls and fees on straits used for international navigation[45].

2.4 Other Vulnerable Points

The EIA treats the Cape of Good Hope as an alternative route with no narrow passage. It has served as the safety valve in times of crisis in the past at the cost of the longer voyages. Here, though, piracy off Somalia is re-emerging as a challenge.

35 UNCTAD, Review of Maritime Transport 2025, Chapter III, pp. 72–74.

36 UNCTAD, op. cit. (n. 34).

37 IMF staff report for the fourth review of Egypt's programme, as reported by Hellenic Shipping News, 21 July 2025.

38 EIA, op. cit. (n. 1), Tables 2 and 6.

39 AGBI, "Iran-backed Houthis declare naval blockade on Saudi Arabia", 20 July 2026.

40 Reuters

41 EIA, op. cit. (n. 1), Table 3.

42 S&P Global Commodity Insights, "Indonesia's toll remarks for Malacca Strait draw attention to choke point risks", 23 April 2026, citing E3G

43 ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB), half-year piracy report for January–June 2026, as reported by Hellenic Shipping News, July 2026.

44 S&P Global Commodity Insights, op. cit. (n. 42).

45 Reuters, "Sixty countries back declaration opposing strait tolls", Brussels, 12 October 2026, as republished by Internazionale.

According to the IMB, 38 piracy and armed robbery incidents were recorded worldwide in the first half of 2026, the lowest for that period since 1992. Yet off Somalia, four vessels were hijacked in April and May 2026, and Somali pirates accounted for 94 per cent of the 67 crews taken hostage globally. These waters are patrolled by the EU's Operation ATALANTA, whose mandate runs until February 2027[46].

Submarine cables, discussed in Chapter 1, form a parallel set of chokepoints along the same corridors. Satellite navigation also proves to be a weak point. In June 2025, the analytics firm Windward reported that Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) interference affected nearly 1,000 ships in the Gulf, and the Joint Maritime Information Centre reported jamming across the Strait of Hormuz[47]. In the same month, war-risk premiums for Hormuz transits moved upwards from 0.07 per cent to 2 per cent of ship value[48].

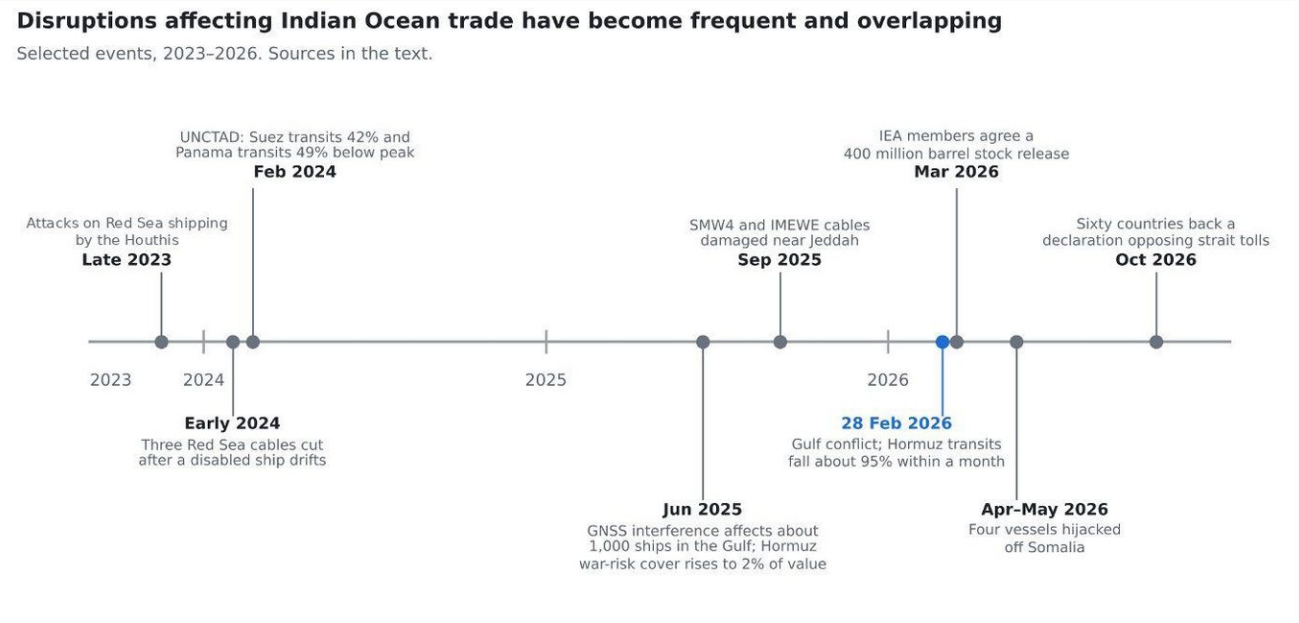


Figure 5. Selected disruptions affecting Indian Ocean trade, 2023–2026. Compiled by the author from the sources cited in this chapter and in Chapter 1.

2.5 Lessons from Recent Disruptions

Firstly, the chokepoints operate in unison. For instance, diversion of the Saudi crude away from the Strait of Hormuz lifted flows through Bab el-Mandeb. Meanwhile, Malacca lost volume because its cargoes originate upstream. Disruptions also tend to overlap. In early 2024, Red Sea diversions coincided with Panama Canal transits that were running 49 per cent below their peak[49]. In 2026, the Hormuz closure happened while the Red Sea traffic was still depressed (Figure 5).

46 IMB, op. cit. (n. 41); Council of the EU, "Horn of Africa and Somalia: Operation ATALANTA, EUTM and EUCAP Somalia's mandates extended for two years", 16 December 2024.

47 GPS World, 18 June 2025, citing Windward and the Joint Maritime Information Centre.

48 https://unctad.org/publication/strait-hormuz-disruptions-implications-global-trade-and-development

Secondly, longer routes absorb shocks but at a price. For instance, shipping through the Cape of Good Hope kept goods moving but at the cost of rising tonne-miles, freight rates and emissions.

Thirdly, though oil could be partly rerouted, gas and fertiliser largely do not have that option, as pipelines offer 3.5–5.5 mb/d of spare oil capacity around the Strait of Hormuz and none for LNG[50]. This could cause extensive economic damage to the South Asian importers that carry the heaviest LNG exposure.

Lastly, the legal and technical foundations of navigation are under strain: proposals for transit levies have prompted a 60-country declaration in defence of toll-free passage[51]. Navigation interference, cable damage, insurance costs and stranded crews also push up trade costs even where no ship is attacked.

49 UNCTAD, op. cit. (n. 34).

50 IEA, op. cit. (n. 14).

51 Reuters, op. cit. (n. 45).

Strait of Hormuz

MOST DISRUPTED 2026

39 km narrowest point

21.2 mb/d of oil, 2025

44% of its crude to India, China

- Few substitutes: pipelines offer 3.5–5.5 mb/d of spare capacity and no route for LNG
- Since 28 Feb 2026, oil flows fell to 14.9 mb/d in Q1 and 4.9 mb/d in Q2
- LNG almost stopped: 10.5 to 0.8 bcf/d
- War-risk cover rose from 0.07% to 2% of ship value; GNSS jamming in the Gulf

Bab el-Mandeb, Red Sea, Suez

29 km narrowest point

–42% Suez transits, Feb 2024

–67% container transits

- Houthi attacks from late 2023 pushed carriers around Africa
- Tonne-miles up 17% in 2024; freight index about 149% above 2023
- Suez revenue: USD 6.6 bn to 3.6 bn
- 2026: outlet for Saudi crude, flows up 75%; Houthi blockade declared in July

Vulnerable points

in the IOR

Strait of Malacca

2.7 km Phillips Channel

23.6 mb/d of oil, 2025

+8 days per round trip via Lombok

- Largest oil chokepoint; also 8.9–10.1 bcf/d of LNG; inherits the Gulf's exposure
- Sunda too shallow; rerouting could idle about one-sixth of tanker capacity
- Low crime: four boardings, Apr–Jun 2026
- Toll idea (Apr 2026) met by a 60-country declaration against strait tolls (Oct 2026)

Other vulnerable points

9.3 mb/d round the Cape of Good Hope

94% of crews taken hostage: Somalia

- Cape of Good Hope: the safety valve, at the cost of longer voyages
- Piracy returns: four ships hijacked off Somalia, Apr–May 2026
- Submarine cables cut in 2024 and 2025
- Satellite navigation: interference hit about 1,000 ships in the Gulf (Jun 2025)

Lessons from recent disruptions

1. **Chokepoints work in unison**
   Hormuz diversions lifted Bab el-Mandeb; Malacca lost upstream cargo
2. **Longer routes absorb shocks**
   but at the cost of tonne-miles, freight rates and emissions
3. **Gas and fertiliser cannot reroute**
   no bypass for LNG; South Asian importers carry the heaviest exposure
4. **Rules and systems are under strain**
   toll proposals, GNSS interference, cable damage and insurance costs

mb/d: million barrels a day; bcf/d: billion cubic feet a day. Figures as cited in Chapter 2.



CHAPTER

03

India and China at Sea

True to the strategic thinking of the early independence days, India and China mostly engaged each other across the mountains and along land borders. It took the 21st century for that engagement to take on a maritime dimension. Both countries are dependent on the ocean for their trade and energy supplies, both are building naval strength, and both are harnessing partnerships to keep the waters accessible.

This chapter details the positioning of both countries in the region, their maritime strength and what the region means to each of them in their view of the world.

3.1 China's Interest in the Indian Ocean

The genesis of China's interests in the Indian Ocean lies in its over-dependence on the Strait of Malacca, which, if obstructed, can lead to a catastrophic crisis, a phenomenon popularly termed China's **Malacca Dilemma**. Nearly two-thirds of its trade passes through the Strait of Malacca, including 80% of its energy imports[52].

There are only two ways for China to **circumvent this dilemma**: one is to build overland alternatives and the second is to build its presence in the ocean. Under its flagship **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been working in mission mode to build infrastructure and de-risk the critical sea lanes of communication from the possibility of such vulnerabilities.

The **Maritime Silk Road (MSR)** is one such initiative announced in 2013 to strengthen China's presence across Southeast Asia, Oceania, the Indian Ocean, and East Africa. Chinese engagement in BRI projects since 2013 totals almost USD 1.4 trillion across investment and construction contracts[53]. 2025 saw record engagement of USD 213.5 billion, with energy-related deals also at a record high[54].

The first of these overland alternative routes allow oil and gas to reach China by circumventing Strait of Malacca. The most significant of these is the China – Myanmar twin pipeline running from Kyaukphyu in Myanmar's Bay of Bengal coast through Rakhine, Magway, Mandalay and Shan states. It then enters China at Ruili in the Yunnan province. The gas pipeline became operational in 2013 followed by the oil pipeline in 2017 at a combined cost of 2.54 billion USD[55] . Under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a second route, the Gwadar–Kashgar crude oil pipeline, has also been proposed at an estimated cost of 65 billion USD[56].

52 Oliveira, J.C. (2024). The "Malacca Dilemma" and the maritime routes between China and Europe. Macau News Agency. [online] 8 Jan. Available at: https://www.macaubusiness.com/opinion-the-malacca-dilemma-and-the-maritime-routes-between-china-and-europe/

53 'China BRI Investment Report 2025' (Griffith Asia Institute, Jan 2026): record USD 213.5bn engagement in 2025 (USD 85.2bn investment + USD 128.4bn construction), energy a record USD 93.9bn, cumulative almost USD 1.4tn.

54 https://blogs.griffith.edu.au/asiainsights/china-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-investment-report-2025-2/

55 Offshore Technology, "Myanmar–China Oil and Gas Pipelines"

56 https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/china-pakistan-cpec-counter-india-10722312/

Chinese companies are also acquiring, building and operating strategically important ports across the region and especially around the Indian Ocean littorals. Also termed as the 'string of pearls', by some analysts, the list of ports includes Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Gwadar in Pakistan and Kyaukphyu in Myanmar, amongst others. While commercial on paper, these ports have dual-use potential: they serve civilian traffic but could support naval operations if needed.

Militarily too, China now operates the largest navy in the world with over 1,000 ships (including both auxiliary and support ships), 64 submarines and three aircraft carriers[57].

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is also conducting more active operations in the Western Pacific, the Indian Ocean and in the waters around Europe. Beyond the military build-up, Chinese research vessels are a regular sight; one estimate puts the number active in the Indian Ocean since 2020 at 64[58].

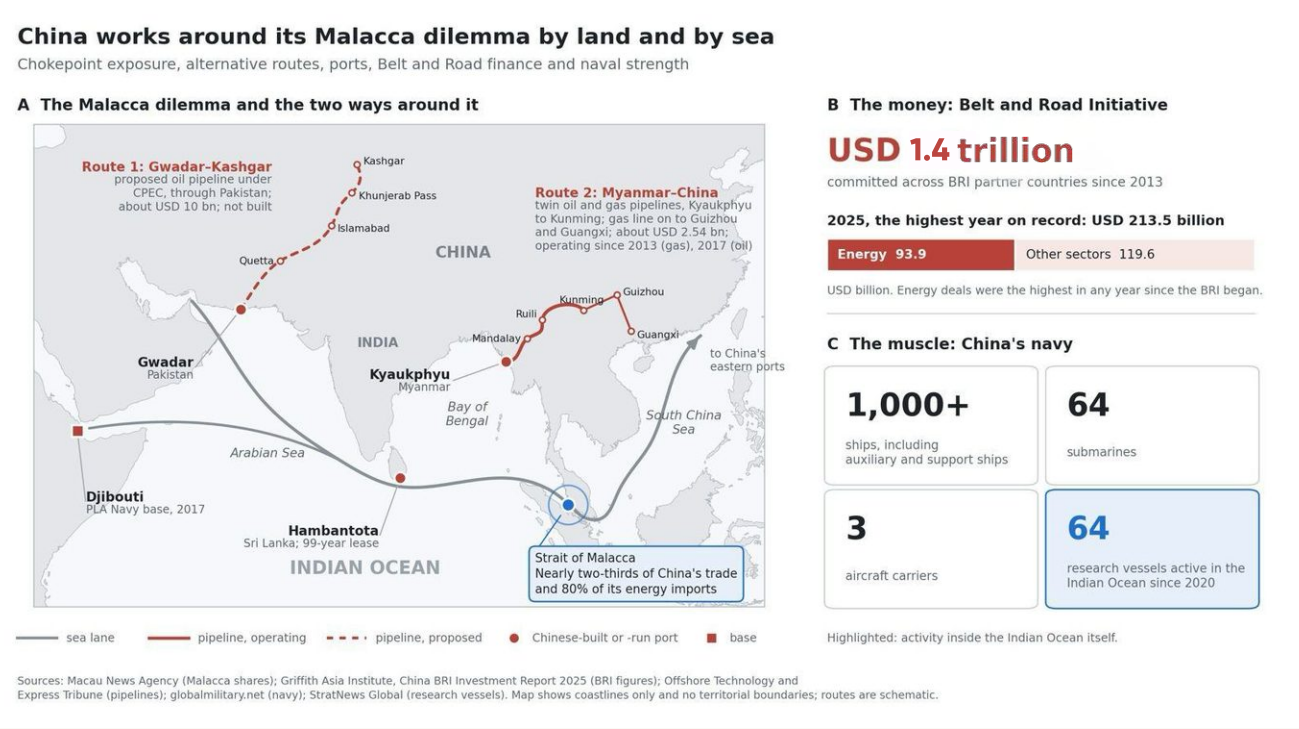


Figure 6. China's way around its Malacca Dilemma.

Map for representation purposes only, and doesn't depict international boundaries of India accurately

57 https://www.globalmilitary.net/compare/navies/chn-vs-usa/

58 StratNews Global, China 'Weaponising' Research in Indian Ocean, What India Can Do.

3.2 India's Interest in the Indian Ocean

India's engagement with the Indian Ocean goes beyond its dependence on the sea for 95% of its trade by volume and 70% by value; it rests on the idea of a naturally extended maritime neighbourhood. While there is a battle for great power dominance in the region, India's stance rests on the pillars of peace, stability and inclusivity. This is the region through which trade flowed, cultures connected and civilisations flourished.

The fulcrum of India's engagement in the Indian Ocean lies in the motto of **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**, which was unveiled as India's maritime vision by the Prime Minister in 2015. "Our vision for the IOR is rooted in advancing cooperation in our region; and, to use our capabilities for the benefit of all in our common maritime home", said the Prime Minister in Mauritius then. Standing the test of time, India has emerged as the first responder in times of crisis for the region.

It was to widen this vision and include the larger Global South that the **Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR)** policy was announced a decade after the SAGAR vision.

Though numerically short of the Chinese vessels, India operates about 140 warships, 19 submarines and two aircraft carriers in its naval fleet[59] with additional vessels being added at a historic speed. With the scaling up of its domestic industry, India has become the only country apart from the permanent members of the UNSC that can build both an aircraft carrier and a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine.

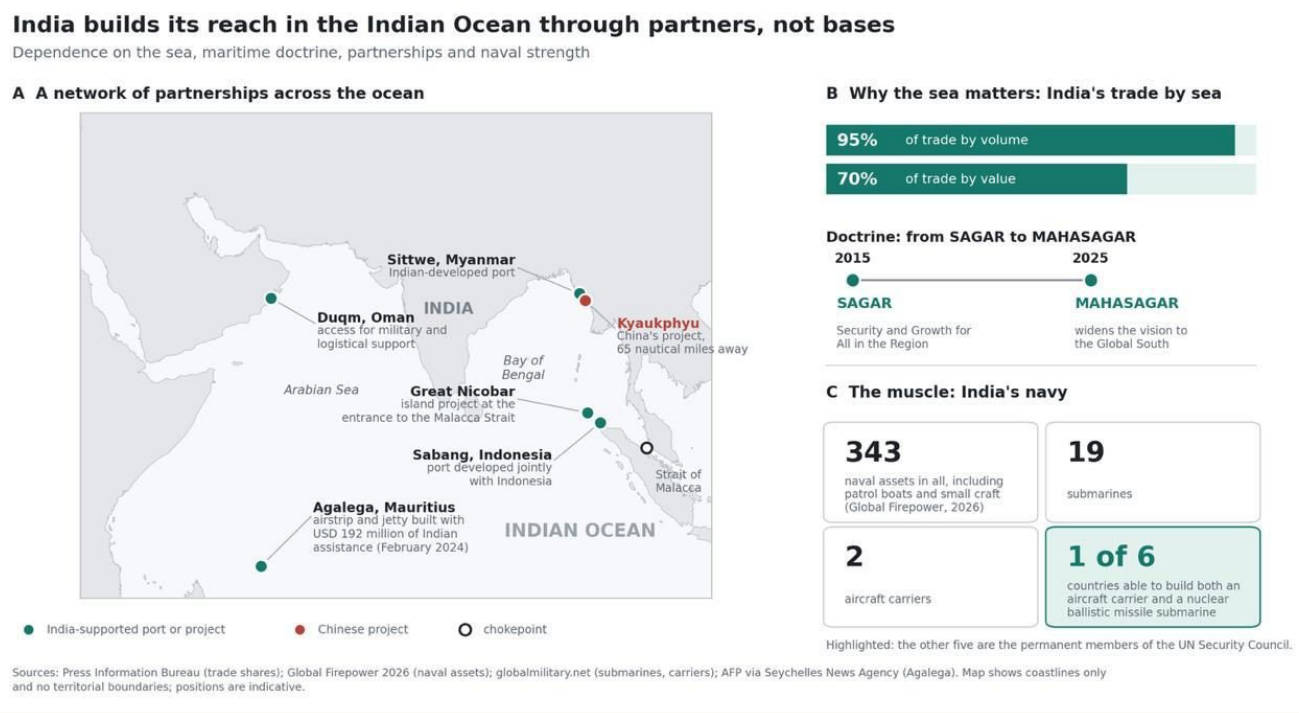


Figure 7. India's approach to expanding its reach in the IOR

Map for representation purposes only, and doesn't depict international boundaries of India accurately

59 https://www.globalmilitary.net/compare/navies/chn-vs-ind/

India's footprint in the Indian Ocean is strengthened with the **presence of overseas posts, cordial alliances and a greater number of joint military operations**. India has also built a modest network of posts and access points without seeking formal military bases. The 192 million USD[60] assistance to build an airstrip and a jetty at Mauritius' Agalega Islands in February 2024 gives the Indian Navy an access point off the east coast of Africa. It also has access to Oman's Duqm port for military and logistical support, and Myanmar's Sittwe port (just 65 nautical miles from China's project in Kyaukphyu). The Government of India's ambitious Great Nicobar Island project also gives the Indian Navy a more prominent and strategic positioning at the gates of the Strait of Malacca, while India and Indonesia are also jointly developing the Sabang port in Indonesia's Aceh province.

India's most useful tool in the Indian Ocean is information. Through the Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), India provides 28 partner countries and 54 global organisation with a picture of regional shipping that no other regional actor can match.[61]

3.3 Balancing the India - China Equation

India and China have never been in any confrontation as far as the waters of the Indian Ocean are concerned. The docking of Chinese research vessels in its maritime neighbourhood was dealt with diplomatically. Unlike the disruptions in West Asia, the India–China power mismatch has left global trade unharmed. However, long-term consequences of greater militarisation, debt burdens that threaten sovereignty and growing pressure on SIDS to maintain neutrality cannot be completely ruled out.

At the same time, trade ties the two countries together in the IOR. Closure of the Strait of Hormuz or the Red Sea is a shared threat between both. Both countries rely on Gulf energy carried across the Indian Ocean, as noted earlier.

	India	China
Crude oil through Hormuz, 2025	With China, 44 per cent of crude through the strait	With India, 44 per cent of crude through the strait
LNG through Hormuz	With Bangladesh and Pakistan, almost two-thirds of LNG imports came this way (2025)	With India and South Korea, 52 per cent of Hormuz LNG went to these three markets (2024)
Crude oil through Malacca, first half of 2025	Not a principal route for India's Gulf crude	7.9 mb/d, about 48 per cent of crude carried through the strait
Overland bypass for oil	None in operation	Myanmar–China pipeline: 440,000 b/d capacity, about 219,000 b/d used (2023)
Strategic oil stocks, mid-2026 (EIA estimate)	About 21 million barrels	About 1,492 million barrels

Table 2. Exposure of India and China to Indian Ocean sea lanes.

60 Seychelles News Agency (AFP), Mauritius launches India-funded air strip in Agalega, March 2024

61 https://ifcior.indiannavy.gov.in/home



CHAPTER

04

Other Powers in the IOR

The region has long been host to non-regional powers that sail through, secure and operate in the waters. Some come through alliances, some as individual countries and some through joint exercises, but every major power in the world aspires for a foot in the Indian Ocean.

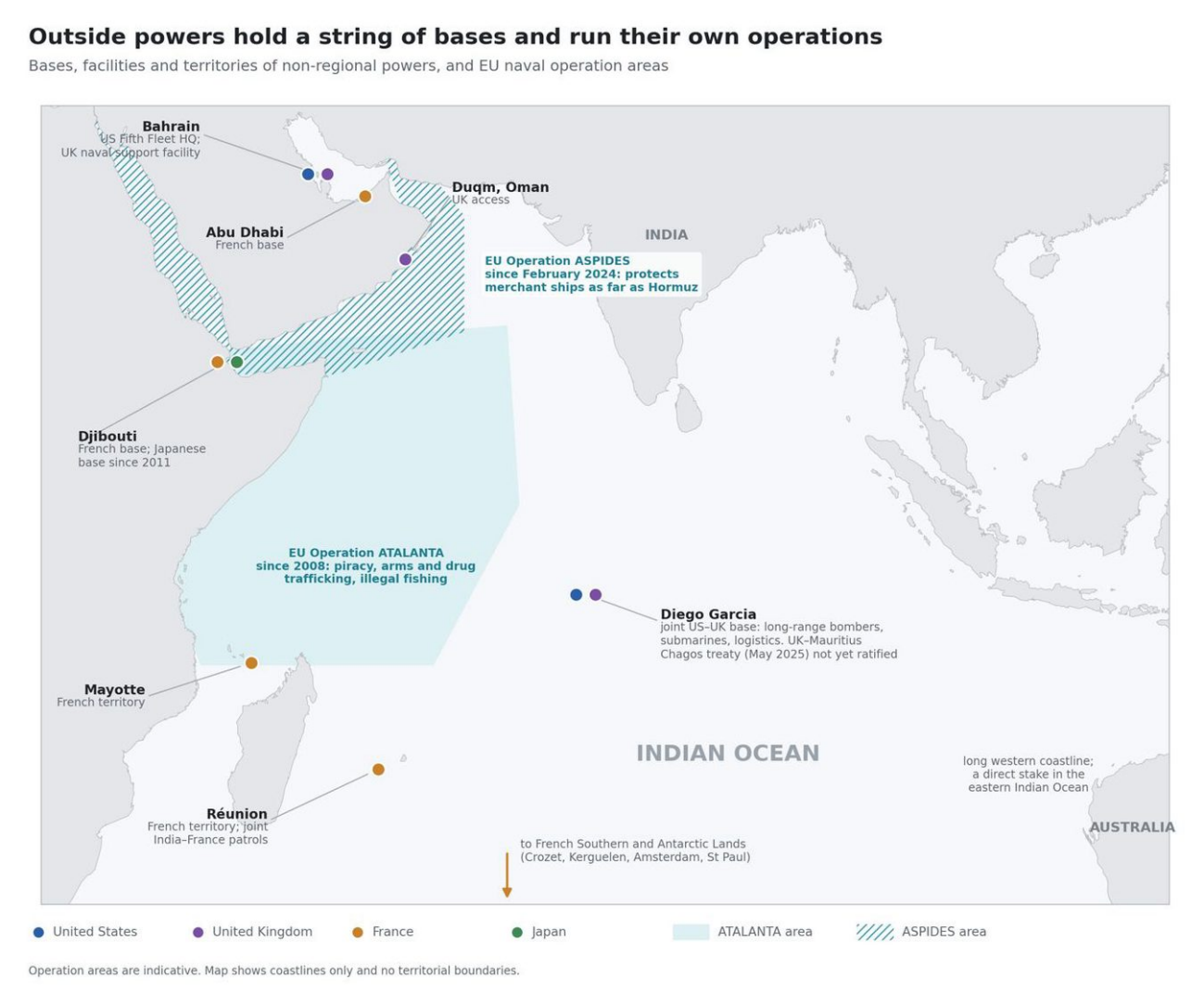


Figure 8. Presence of other powers in the IOR

Map for representation purposes only, and doesn't depict international boundaries of India accurately

4.1 United States of America

The US has its Fifth Fleet headquartered in Bahrain and operates a joint base with the UK on the island of Diego Garcia, right in the middle of the ocean. The base is capable of handling long-range bombers and submarines and supports operational logistics across West Asia and beyond.

The US has also played an active role in crisis response management in the region. In 2026, the US was a direct party in the conflict with Iran and provided protection for tankers, which also led to partial recovery in Gulf crude exports. Operation Prosperity Guardian, launched in the

Red Sea in December 2023, and strikes on Houthi targets in 2024 and 2025 are among its other recent operations.

4.2 United Kingdom

With its main asset in Diego Garcia, the UK is one of the oldest operational powers in the Indian Ocean. In May 2025, the UK and Mauritius signed a treaty transferring sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius, while the UK would keep Diego Garcia under a 99-year lease to ensure continuity of operations. However, the treaty has been contested in the British Parliament, and in April 2026 the UK shelved ratification after the US withdrew its support.

The UK also has a naval support facility in Bahrain and access to the Duqm port in Oman. It is also one of the countries to have posted a liaison officer at the India-run IFC-IOR.

4.3 France

France is the only resident European power in the IOR. Its overseas territories of Réunion and Mayotte, along with the French Southern and Antarctic Lands, give it access to a large exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the south-western part of the Indian Ocean. A permanent naval command in the region and military bases in Djibouti and Abu Dhabi are part of France's efforts to maintain its presence and stake in the region.

India and France also enjoy close defence ties. The two navies hold annual joint exercises, have conducted joint patrols from Reunion and collaborate on maritime domain awareness (MDA). France is often looked at as a natural bridge between India and the wider European Union (EU) to strengthen partnership and cooperation in the Indian Ocean.

4.4The European Union

Over the years, the EU has also built a modest and growing presence in the IOR. Operation ATALANTA, launched in 2008, was the EU's first naval operation to counter Somali piracy and has since been operationally active to monitor arms and drug trafficking and illegal fishing. In February 2024, Operation ASPIDES was launched to protect merchant ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and continues to operate as far as the Strait of Hormuz. According to the operation, ASPIDES supported more than 1,570 vessels in its first 23 months[62]. Both operations will continue until February 2027 with updated mandates of information collection and sharing on suspicious activities around critical infrastructure.

The EU also funds and runs CRIMARIO, its maritime domain awareness and capacity-building programme. Currently in its phase III until January 2028, the programme helps coastal states with maritime information, with member states leading a separate mission in the Strait of Hormuz. In July 2026, Germany posted its first liaison officer at the IFC-IOR, joining France, Italy and the UK.

62 Marine Insight, EU Extends Operation ASPIDES Until 2027, February 2026.

4.5 Other Actors

Regional alliances and interest-based groups have also become more active in the region. Japan has maintained a base in Djibouti since 2011, while Australia, by virtue of its long western coastline, has a direct stake in the Eastern Indian Ocean. Both are close maritime partners of India and the US in the Quad.

The Russian fleet too makes occasional visits with limited stationary presence. Gulf States, Iran and Türkiye have also become more active participants in the affairs of the Indian Ocean, both as naval players and port investors along the Red Sea and Horn of Africa.

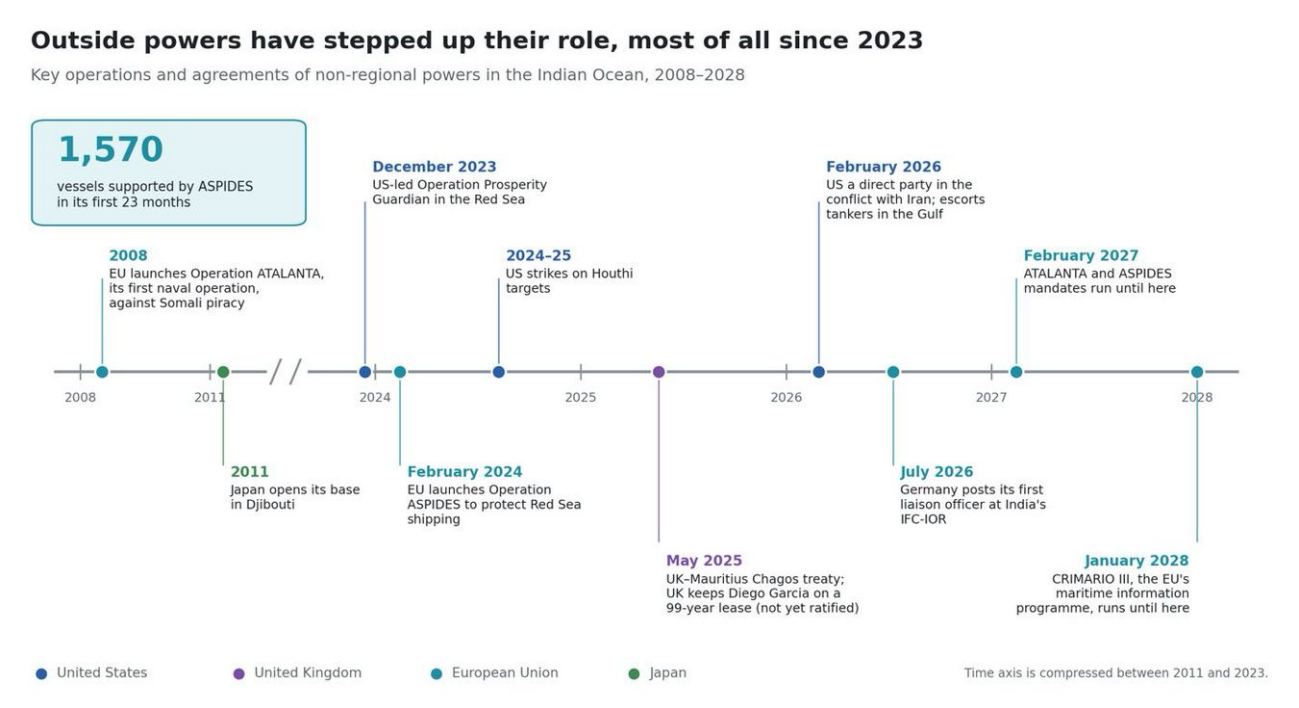


Figure 9. Timeline of expanding role of other powers in the IOR

4.6 Global Implications

With growing interests, swelling investments and support from all major players, where does the Indian Ocean's vulnerability lie? The vulnerability in the rise of the Indian Ocean lies in the world perceiving the zone as a zero-sum game while the reality of the region is anchored in multi-stakeholder-ism. Over-militarisation, transient interest-based partnerships and pressure to choose sides if great-power competition intensifies are constant irritants in an otherwise free and prosperous zone.

The broad direction of the Indian Ocean lies in the coexistence of multiple players, each playing their part while being governed by the rules of the sea and the adjudicating institutions.



CHAPTER

05

Rules of the Sea

In the context of the Indian Ocean, the rules-based maritime order is governed by the UNCLOS – the most comprehensive multilateral convention in the field of ocean governance, often referred to as the constitution of the sea.

5.1 UNCLOS

UNCLOS was adopted in 1982 and came into effect in 1994. India, the EU and all EU member states are parties to it. UNCLOS promotes international peace and security by replacing conflicting claims over coastal waters with standard maritime zones: the territorial sea, contiguous zone, EEZ and continental shelf. It sets the territorial sea at up to 12 nautical miles and the EEZ at up to 200 nautical miles from the baselines, with the high seas beyond.

The convention grants the right of innocent passage through territorial waters and freedom of navigation in the high seas. Most importantly, in the Indian Ocean it creates rights of transit passage through straits used for international navigation, which coastal states cannot suspend.

Iran has signed but not ratified UNCLOS, and so claims the right to restrict passage selectively. Iran's argument stands on the fact that transit passage applies only to states that are parties to the convention. In 2026, Tehran went to the extent of releasing a list of ships barred from passage through an authority it set up[63]. The US has not ratified UNCLOS either.

China, on the other hand, follows a selective approach as far as acceptance of UNCLOS is concerned. While the PRC has ratified the convention, it does not shy away from interpreting its provisions in tandem with the party state's maritime objectives, which the scholar Isaac Kardon calls "China's Law of the Sea"[64]. In July 2016, China rejected the award of an arbitral tribunal constituted under UNCLOS, which found that its 'nine-dash line' claims in the South China Sea had no legal basis.

5.2 Other legal tools

The UNCLOS is supported by several other legal tools in governing the open waters. The 1988 Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA) criminalises attacks on ships under international law. The UNSC authorised international action against Somali piracy in 2008 and, in 2024, demanded an end to Houthi attacks on shipping. Regionally, the Djibouti Code of Conduct brings together stakeholders of the Western Indian Ocean and Red Sea to cooperate against piracy, trafficking and other maritime crimes. On the Eastern front, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery (ReCAAP) has been adopted to reduce attacks in Asian waters, including the Strait of Malacca.

While all these instruments have been effective in countering piracy and non-state players, a gap remains in dealing with attacks on infrastructure by state-backed groups.

63 Lloyd's List Intelligence, Strait of Hormuz Brief: 30 September 2026.

64 Isaac B. Kardon, China's Law of the Sea: The New Rules of Maritime Order (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).

5.3 Undersea Cables: Uncharted Territory

Protection of critical infrastructure such as undersea cables responsible for most of the global communication and data flow is still the weakest part of the existing framework. Article 113 of UNCLOS states that every State shall adopt laws making "the breaking or injury by a ship flying its flag or by a person subject to its jurisdiction of a submarine cable beneath the high seas done wilfully or through culpable negligence" a punishable offence, but enforcement is left to individual states. There is also no mechanism to guarantee repair ships access to damaged sites, and no clarity on liability for damage caused by ships in EEZs.

The Red Sea cable crisis of 2024-25 is a case in point, with repairs taking four to six months, also partly because of the security situation of the region. The EU has also taken concrete steps towards strengthening naval operations for information collection on threats to undersea infrastructure, but the region at large still operates in a vacuum.

5.4 Other Regional Forums

Other regional forums and minilaterals are also actively involved in the region, engaging in both security and non-security matters:

- **The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**: An intergovernmental organisation set up in 1997 and headquartered in Mauritius. IORA's mandate is to facilitate economic cooperation amongst the players of the Indian Ocean rim. The grouping currently has 23 members and 12 dialogue partners, including the EU; India has held the Chair since November 2025 for 2025–27.
- **The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)**: A forum for naval cooperation, with a stronger focus on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), where navies of the littoral states come together for dialogue, information sharing and cooperation in crisis.
- **The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC):** IOC is the only intergovernmental body focused on the south-western Indian Ocean, made up of African island states. Its members are Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and France (for Réunion). The commission has developed regional centres in Madagascar and Seychelles for maritime information and coordinated action at sea.
- **The Colombo Security Conclave (CSC):** The CSC is the most recent grouping to be formalised in the Indian Ocean. The grouping brings together India, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Maldives, Mauritius and Bangladesh with a recently announced secretariat in Colombo.
- **Information Sharing Centres:** Apart from the India-led IFC-IOR, the Indian Ocean region is home to Singapore's Information Fusion Centre and the Europe-supported centres in Madagascar and Seychelles.

If the IOR is so well populated with systems, infrastructure, intentions and interests, where do the challenges lie?

1. **No region-wide security framework**: Given the huge expanse of the waters across continents, the region lacks a unified security architecture or SOPs to deal with untoward incidents.
2. **Absence of strong penal actions:** The law defines attacks on ships as criminal but leaves response and prosecution to individual states and ad hoc coalitions.
3. **Vulnerability of seabed infrastructure:** Absence of clear guidelines governing access and repair to undersea cables proves to be a challenge.

The gaps in IOR governance do not require new initiatives but better utilisation and greater cooperation in ensuring compliance and implementation. India and the EU are well placed to take the lead in this.

UNCLOS: the constitution of the sea

1982 adopted; in force 1994

12 nm territorial sea

200 nm exclusive economic zone

- Parties include India, the EU and all EU member states
- Innocent passage in territorial waters; freedom of navigation on the high seas
- Transit passage through international straits, which coastal states cannot suspend

Who stands apart

Iran: signed, not ratified
claims a right to restrict passage; in 2026 it listed ships barred from Hormuz

United States
has not ratified UNCLOS either

China: ratified, read selectively
"China's Law of the Sea"; rejected the 2016 tribunal award on the nine-dash line

Rules of the sea in the IOR

Other legal tools

- 1988 SUA Convention makes attacks on ships a crime under international law
- UN Security Council: action against Somali piracy (2008); end to Houthi attacks (2024)
- Djibouti Code of Conduct: Western Indian Ocean and Red Sea
- ReCAAP: Asian waters, including Malacca

Undersea cables

WEAKEST LINK

- Article 113: states must punish wilful or negligent cable damage, but enforcement is left to each state
- No guaranteed access for repair ships; no clarity on liability in EEZs
- Red Sea cable crisis, 2024–25: repairs took four to six months

Regional forums and centres

IORA
1997, Mauritius; 23 members, 12 dialogue partners incl. the EU; India chairs 2025–27

IONS
naval forum for dialogue, information sharing and disaster relief (HADR)

IOC
south-western Indian Ocean; four island states and France (Réunion)

Colombo Security Conclave
India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Bangladesh and Seychelles

Information centres
IFC-IOR (India), Singapore, and centres in Madagascar and Seychelles

Where the gaps lie

1 No region-wide framework
no unified security architecture or SOPs

2 Weak penal action
prosecution left to states and ad hoc coalitions

3 Seabed infra-structure exposed
no clear rules on cable access and repair

The way forward
not new initiatives but better use and compliance; India and the EU can lead



CHAPTER

06

India–EU Cooperation and the Way Ahead for the Indian Ocean

India and the EU have been strategic partners since 2004, concluded negotiations on an FTA in January 2026 and at the same time signed their first security and defence partnership. A multi-faceted partnership such as this is well placed to further their mutual development agenda in the IOR, ensuring peace and prosperity for all.

The previous chapters examined the place of the Indian Ocean in world affairs, the chokepoints and vulnerabilities, positioning of India and China along with the global balance of power, role of other global powers and the laws and treaties governing the sea. This chapter talks about the role of a growing India – Europe camaraderie and the implications for the region at large.

The scope of this chapter is limited to situating the security and defence partnership between India and Europe within the larger realm of cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

6.1 Security and Defence Partnership

The security and defence partnership sets a framework to guide the larger India – EU defence ties. It covers areas of maritime security, cyber threats, counter terrorism operations and an annual EU – India security and defence dialogue with thematic exchanges. Negotiations have also begun on a Security Information Agreement which would enable the exchange of

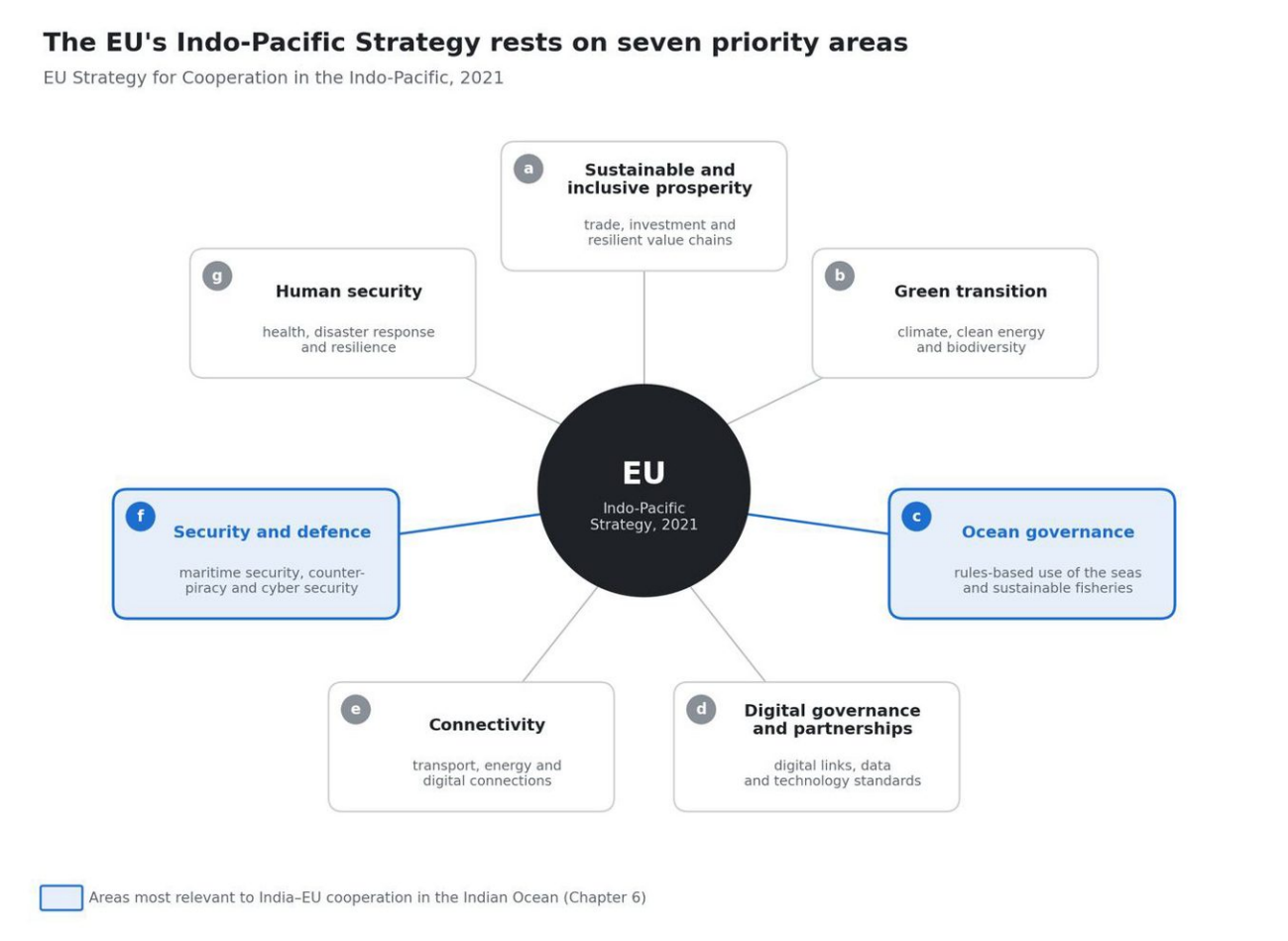


Figure 10. Pillars of EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy

classified information and cooperation amongst defence enterprises to collaborate on development and production of defence equipment. The importance of maritime security in the relationship was signalled by the participation of an EU naval contingent in India's Republic Day parade in 2026.

A complementary gesture came when the EU's Operation ATALANTA made its first port call in India, at Mumbai, in May 2025, followed by a joint exercise between the two forces in June 2025. This was preceded by four rounds of talks between India and the EU on Maritime Security, with the latest one being in March 2025. The partnership is thus being strengthened by working-level cooperation, which is growing year on year.

The emphasis on security partnership and conclusion of the India – EU FTA also builds on the groundwork laid by the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy of 2021, which listed ocean governance, and security and defence as its priority areas, among others.

6.2 A Shared Stake

Ever since globalisation changed the course of the world, sea lanes have been central to connecting the world. Over-dependence on the maritime global commons led the world to assume that economic security could be pursued without investing in securing the sea lanes, thus often taking the liberty of thinking about economic security and maritime security in silos.

It took the Hormuz crisis for the world at large to appreciate the importance of securing these maritime corridors not just from non-state actors but also from global conflicts. Economic losses, extended timelines and loss of perishables are just some of the many pitfalls that the world has been witnessing.

India and the EU too felt the ripples more than ever. An increase in gas prices, food inflation and fluctuating financial markets were some of the more consequential impacts. The security of the IOR thus also became a channel to ensure economic security for both the partners. Keeping the sea lanes open is not only necessary for the physical movement of goods but also to keep the services and people-to-people ties flourishing.

6.3 Potential for Defence Technology Cooperation

As mentioned in Chapter 3, India is upgrading its naval technology and infrastructure to upscale its capabilities in the maritime neighbourhood. The EU has emerged as one of India's strongest defence and technology partners. While France and India have been cooperating on Kalvari-class submarines and Rafale jets, Germany and India are set to initiate Project 75(I). Under it, Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems and India's Mazagaon Dock Shipbuilders will build six submarines in India with transfer of design and technology.

Beyond intellectual and technology inputs, cooperation and exchange of information through the India-based IFC-IOR, after an EU liaison officer has been deployed, will be of significance as far as maritime domain awareness is concerned.

Both India and the EU have been following a pragmatic path in advancing the existing frameworks of cooperation. There is also mutual respect for India's choice of strategic autonomy in military alliances and each side's interpretation of about laws concerning rights of passage in the EEZ of coastal states. However, none of these differences have been an impediment to the furthering of maritime cooperation. Consistent and open dialogue between both partners will play a key role in establishing a robust and trust-based ecosystem.

Conclusion

The future of India – EU cooperation in securing the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean Region, thus, lies in adopting a multi-faceted policy of engagement at Government-to-Government (G2G), Government-to-Business (G2B) and Business-to-Business (B2B) levels.

Going ahead, the lessons from the Hormuz crisis should serve as a case study for building a contingency plan for disruptions around choke points. The two partners are also well placed to leverage multiple Track 1.5 and Track 2 platforms, such as India's Indian Ocean Conference and Germany's Munich Security Conference, to build dialogue among security experts and thought leaders.

As mentioned previously, data will play a very important role in ensuring free passage through the waters of the Indian Ocean and thus, the deployment of an EU representative at the IFC-IOR will be consequential.

The title of the paper thus succinctly captures the sentiment floating in the Indian and European policy corridors today: Security of the Indian Ocean Region is a strategic necessity, backed by facts, figures and outlooks. How we cooperate is left to us.

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About the Organisations

INDIA FOUNDATION

India Foundation is an independent research centre focussed on the issues, challenges and opportunities of the Indian polity. The Foundation believes in understanding contemporary India and its global context through a civilizational lens of a society on the forward move. Based on the principles of independence, objectivity and academic rigour, the Foundation aims at increasing awareness and advocating its views on issues of both national and international importance. It seeks to articulate Indian nationalistic perspective on issues. India Foundation's vision is to be a premier think tank that can help understand the Indian civilizational influence on our contemporary society.

FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION FOR FREEDOM (FNF)

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) is a German political foundation that promotes liberal values, economic openness, education, and dialogue. FNF works with civil society organizations, think tanks, and academic institutions to advance individual freedom and open societies. In India, FNF works from its office in New Delhi with leading Indian organizations on geopolitics, economy & trade, and education. Through collaborations such as this paper, FNF aims to foster informed discussion and enhance mutual understanding between India, Germany, and Europe. For more information about our work, visit www.freiheit.org/india





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