

Discuss the Evolution of India's 'Look West' Policy, the Driving Factors, and Its Impact on India's Economic and Strategic Interests in West Asia.

India's 'Look West' policy has significantly evolved over the past few years, reflecting a dynamic shift in its approach to the West Asian region. Initially focused on energy security and the welfare of the Indian diaspora, the policy has expanded to include strategic, economic, and security dimensions, driven by both regional and global changes.

Evolution of the 'Look West' Policy

1. From Energy Dependence to Strategic Partnerships:

- While India traditionally viewed West Asia as a critical supplier of **oil and gas**, the policy has broadened to include **trade, investments, defense cooperation, and counterterrorism** efforts.
- Relations have transformed from transactional ties to **comprehensive strategic partnerships** with countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Iran.

2. Increased Diplomatic Engagement:

- High-level visits and bilateral agreements have strengthened India's political and diplomatic presence in the region.
- Initiatives such as **India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** and forums like **I2U2** (India, Israel, UAE, USA) signify this deeper engagement.

3. Multi-Alignment Strategy:

- India has skillfully balanced relations with rivals in the region—**Saudi Arabia and Iran**—while also strengthening ties with countries like **Israel** to advance technology and defense collaborations.
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Factors Driving the Policy Shift

1. Energy Security:

- West Asia remains India's largest source of **crude oil and natural gas**, making it indispensable for meeting India's growing energy demands.

2. Economic Cooperation and Trade:

- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are major trading partners, contributing to **India's export growth and remittances**, with over 9 million Indian expatriates working in the region.
- Initiatives like CEPA with the UAE have opened new trade opportunities.

3. Geopolitical Realignments:

- Changing power dynamics in West Asia, including the **Abraham Accords** and the rise of **China's influence**, have pushed India to proactively engage to secure its interests.

4. Security and Counterterrorism:

- India's concerns over terrorism and piracy in the Arabian Sea have led to defense cooperation with countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

- The **Indo-Pacific strategy** has also brought renewed focus on maritime security and regional stability.

5. **Diaspora and Remittances:**

- The Indian workforce in West Asia contributes significantly to **India's foreign exchange reserves**, making the welfare of the diaspora a key priority.
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Impact on India's Economic and Strategic Interests

1. **Economic Benefits:**

- Strengthened trade and investment ties have bolstered India's economic growth, particularly in sectors like **infrastructure, energy, and technology**.
- Agreements like CEPA enhance market access for Indian businesses.

2. **Strategic Influence:**

- Enhanced partnerships allow India to play a more significant role in the West Asian region, countering China's growing presence and aligning with friendly nations.
- Defense cooperation has improved India's strategic depth and **maritime security** in the Arabian Sea and beyond.

3. **Energy Security:**

- Stable energy supplies from West Asia are critical to support India's industrial and developmental goals.

4. **Diaspora Welfare:**

- A focus on improving labor conditions and securing the interests of Indian workers has strengthened ties with Gulf nations.

5. **Geopolitical Stability:**

- India's balanced approach to regional players has allowed it to remain neutral while advancing its strategic and economic interests in the region.
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Conclusion

India's evolving '**Look West**' policy reflects its growing aspirations to emerge as a global economic and strategic player. Driven by energy security, economic partnerships, and geopolitical shifts, the policy has enabled India to secure vital interests in West Asia while maintaining a delicate balance amidst regional rivalries. This approach has not only deepened economic ties but also strengthened India's strategic influence in the region.