



FROM HORMUZ TO THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: INDIA, ISRAEL, AND THE INDO-PACIFIC'S WESTERN FLANK

by
Roie Yellinek

The Indo-Pacific does not end at Malacca. For India, it begins to fail at Hormuz and is secured—or lost—in the Eastern Mediterranean.

That is not a metaphor. It is a map problem. For a generation, strategic maps have drawn the Indo-Pacific as an eastern theater of carriers, chokepoints, and semiconductor hubs, while West Asia has remained a separate folder labeled energy, diaspora, and crisis management. India and Israel already operate on a different map: a continuous security-and-energy theater from the Strait of Hormuz to Haifa. Call it the ‘western flank of the Indo-Pacific’. Whoever organizes the logic of that flank shapes India’s freedom of action against China—not merely the price of a barrel of oil.

Maps, as the United Nations reminded the world in September 2026, are never only paper. When the General Assembly adopted the “Correct the Map” resolution and urged wider use of equal-area projections such as Equal Earth, African states were not asking cartographers for a favor. They were insisting that distorted representation produces distorted politics. “A fair map does not change the geography of the world,” Togo’s representative said; “it changes how we see the world.”

The same insight applies west of India. As long as strategy textbooks keep the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific in separate pages in the atlas, policy will keep treating India’s Gulf exposure and India’s China challenge as unrelated files. They are not. They are two edges of the same strategic problem.

Three Nodes, One Theater

A useful western-flank map has three failure points. **Hormuz** is the energy choke. Before the latest West

Asia crisis, roughly 45 percent of India’s crude imports, about half of its LNG, and nearly 90 percent of its LPG still moved through that narrow waterway. Diversification of suppliers has been real and important; concentration of routes has remained the softer underbelly. Energy security that ignores maritime security does not last through a crisis.

The Red Sea and Suez form the logistics choke. Shipping insurance, drone and Houthi disruption, and wartime rerouting have already shown how quickly a trade corridor becomes a combat zone. Connectivity that assumes calm water fails under fire.

The Eastern Mediterranean, with Israel as its high-trust pier into Europe and NATO-adjacent space, is the secure hinge. Haifa is not only a commercial port; it is a strategic landing point where Indian westward connectivity meets European industrial and security ecosystems. I2U2 and the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) are the economic expressions of this geography. West Asia is already a fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific. The question is whether India will write that fact into doctrine before the next crisis does.

Israel, in this frame, is not a sentimental bilateral. It is position. Defense cooperation, intelligence, counter-UAS, missile defense, and maritime domain awareness are Indo-Pacific-relevant capabilities wearing a West Asian label. Israel is a secure node on Europe’s doorstep: it expands India’s options without forcing New Delhi into an Arab–Iran zero-sum trap. Adani’s controlling stake in Haifa Port and the November 2025 India–Israel defense cooperation MoU are not side stories. They are anchors of the same westward map—capital and capability tied to a Mediterranean pier that IMEC needs if the corridor is to mean more than a summit photograph.

Partnership with Gulf states remains essential and complementary. Western-flank logic is additive. It does not ask India to choose between Riyadh and Jerusalem; it asks New Delhi to stop pretending those relationships live on different strategic planets. The states that sign energy contracts in the Gulf and the

partner that holds the East Med hinge belong on one dashboard.

China's Preferred Cartography

Beijing benefits when West Asia and the Indo-Pacific stay cognitively separate. A fragmented map keeps India reacting to Gulf shocks as energy emergencies and to Chinese pressure as an eastern naval problem. A fused map is harder for China to free-ride.

The pattern is now familiar. China calls for restraint while discounted Iranian crude continues to move; it criticizes American overstretch while avoiding costly entanglement; it enjoys a distracted United States without paying the security bill for the chokepoint on which Asian industry depends. Soft critique is enough here: China's Middle East posture is calibrated ambiguity. The same posture prefers an India whose western flank is noisy, expensive, and left without a doctrine.

The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement of August 7, 2026 sharpens the point. When Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Pakistan signed a collective-defense pact in Islam's holiest city—Turkish technology, Saudi capital, Pakistani manpower and nuclear deterrence—much of the commentary treated the deal as another nail in America's Gulf coffin and therefore, almost by definition, a Chinese win. Multipolarity that drifts away from Washington does not automatically drift toward Beijing. Mecca creates something China has rarely faced in the Islamic world: an independent strategic pole with no Chinese seat, no Chinese veto, and no Chinese visibility. Beijing may praise “regional ownership” of security. It should also notice that a region learning to live without America can, by the same logic, learn to live without China.

For India, Mecca is not a threat narrative and not a romance. It is a reminder that West Asia's security architecture is being rewritten in real time—by actors who matter to India's energy routes, to Pakistan's strategic bandwidth, and to the corridor politics of IMEC. An autonomous Sunni security community, a stressed Iran, and a China that straddles both without controlling either: this is the environment in

which India's western flank must be navigated. Softly put, Beijing's favorite Middle East story—American decline as Chinese opportunity—is meeting an awkward subplot: poles that refuse to orbit China. Pretending the theater is “only the Middle East” is a habit New Delhi can no longer afford.

Corridors Without a Threat Picture

IMEC's promise—shorter India–Europe transit, hydrogen and digital bridges, an expanded I2U2 logic—remains strategically sound. Grand connectivity visions still die of under-financing, under-coordination, and under-security. A corridor that outruns a shared threat picture is a corridor on paper.

The western flank supplies that missing threat picture: Hormuz disruption, Red Sea predation, and the need for a trusted Mediterranean pier are not optional footnotes to trade. They are the operating conditions of the trade. Without that security grammar, IMEC risks the fate of other connectivity schemes: announced with fanfare, executed slowly, and forgotten the first time a missile crosses a shipping lane.

Maps shape reality. The UN's Africa vote was about how size is seen. India's western-flank problem is about how theaters are seen. Mercator made Africa look small; Indo-Pacific orthodoxy has made Hormuz-to-Haifa look optional. Correcting the map does not invent geography. It stops a false map from inventing bad strategy.

What Follows

Four moves turn the frame into policy.

First, **name the theater**. Official language should speak of the western flank of the Indo-Pacific—Hormuz, Red Sea, Eastern Mediterranean—as one continuum. Vocabulary is not cosmetics. It is how ministries, navies, and budgets find one another.

Second, **operationalize awareness**. Quiet India–Israel—and, where useful, select European—maritime domain awareness from approaches to Hormuz through to the East Med would treat the continuum as a single early-warning problem, not three separate crises.



Third, **industrialize dual-use security**. Co-development that travels across theaters—counter-UAS, missile defense, port and undersea security—serves Gulf exposure and Indo-Pacific resilience at once. Functional partnerships beat ideological blocs.

Fourth, **keep the Gulf and Israel on the same strategic dashboard**. Mecca, IMEC, I2U2, and India–Israel defense ties are chapters of one western story. Managing them as silos is how corridors get absorbed by their own announcements.

China wished for a multipolar West Asia. It is getting one. India does not need to fear that map; it needs to draw it correctly—with Hormuz, the Red Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean on the same page as Malacca and Taiwan. The western flank is already real. The only open question is whether New Delhi will write it into strategy before the next crisis writes it into casualty lists and insurance premiums.

Dr. Roie Yellinek is the Co-Director of the Geopolitics Lab (G-Lab), a geopolitical consultancy firm and the geopolitical advisor for the Israeli National AI Directorate.