

## THE ELEMENTS OF SEA POWER AND THE INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY OF THE WEST ASIAN REGION

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### ABSTRACT

*During the last three decades, China has made significant progress, especially in the fields of economic development, defence, science and technology, and multilateral cooperation. Its emergence as a global power has also increasingly been challenging the US position. Many economic and strategic initiatives taken by China have provided it with strategic space and depth in the neighbouring region as well as the world also. The country is now openly displaying its military power and acting as a hegemon in the South and the East China Sea. The US is trying to counter the emerging influence of China by developing different alliances and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific and other regions. Thus, rivalry and tension have been increasing between China and the US and its allies. The present study analyses the designs of these emerging tensions and conflicts in the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR). The neighbouring West Asian Region (WAR), a playground of different global powers, is also a crucial region for the Indo-Pacific strategic game plan. The WAR has historically been dominated by the West and is therefore an integral part of their strategic thinking. Therefore, the necessity for the WAR to precisely define its strategic interest and responsibility for all surrounding regions and global powers has also been discussed. A discussion has also been made of current naval strength and how to unite it into a single unit. The geopolitical vision of Alfred Thayer Mahan in the form of the 'Elements of Sea Powers' has also been analysed to conclude as to how the WAR should adopt them to become a great naval power. In conclusion, the study also provides many suggestions and options for WAR's Indo-Pacific strategy. The paper is based on secondary data. Meanwhile, the analytical descriptive approach adopted for the present research is based on the analysis of historical facts, discourse, and political developments. The data is collected from various books, journals, government portals, reports, newspapers, and publications of many institutions and organisations.*

**Keywords:** International Security, Security Strategy, Geopolitics, International Relations, Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), West Asia Region (WAR), Sea Power

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## ABOUT THE REGIONS

The Indo-Pacific is not a well-accepted and precisely defined geographic region. It is defined in different ways by geographers, ecologists and geo-strategists. The term 'Indo-Pacific' has a long history. It was first used by Karl Haushofer in 1920, to define the "Indo-Pacific space" (Li, H. 2022). Recently the term got popularity after the then Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe's addressed the Indian parliament in August 2007, where he remarked, "We are now at a point at which the Confluence of the Two Seas is coming into being. The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. 2007, August 22). In the present discussion, the term Indo-Pacific is defined as a region surrounded by and consisting of India, China, Japan, Indonesia, and Australia. It is located at the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and connects countless cultural, economic, political, and natural diversities (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1: Indo-Pacific Region**



**Source:** <https://gasam.org.tr/india-and-the-eu-strategy-for-indo-pacific-region/>

The West Asian Region (WAR) as broadly defined here includes the southwestern part of Asia. It is called by many names including West Asia, Western Asia, Southwest Asia, Middle East or Near East. The region is located at the crossroads between Asia, Africa, and Europe. In the present discussion, the boundaries of the region to a certain extent are similar to 'The Middle East'. Though broadly it is bounded in the west by the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, in the north by the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea, on the east by Iran, and in the south by the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Western Asia is bounded in the west by the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, in the north by the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea, on the east by the fringing mountains of Iran, and in the south by the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The various regions of West Asia include the Anatolian peninsula, the Caucasus region, the Eastern Mediterranean region, the Mesopotamia region, the Syrian region, Palestine, the Sinai Peninsula, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Iranian Highlands. The main countries of the region are Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen.

Figure 2: West Asian Region



Source: <https://www.nationsonline.org/maps/Western-Asia-political-map.jpg>

## **CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION**

In the United States (US) geostrategic policy and thought, control and dominance of the Pacific have always been a primary objective. For maintaining the presence and control of the Atlantic, the US gets support from its European allies. Additionally, there is no country or power which challenges the US and its allies in the Atlantic region. However, to control the Pacific, the US is solely dependent on its army, technology, and diplomacy. Whilst, Australia and New Zealand offer some strategic support, they are also unable to meet the challenges on their own. The US is facing more obstacles as a result of China's rise as a global power. China is asserting itself in the Pacific region also giving priority to the region for its security and other political, economic, and military reasons. The Indo-Pacific region is both, a strategically and economically important area. The region is home to some of the world's largest and most potent economies, including China, Japan, the US, and India.

The US along with India, Australia, and Japan have formed an alliance called the Quad. The main objective of the alliance is to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region. These countries are taking part in various joint activities and launching various economic and military projects as China is asserting itself more and more in the region. Whereas, the AUKUS is a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US, which was formed on 15 September 2021 for the security of the Indo-Pacific region. One of the agreements in this pact is that the US and the UK will assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. To promote economic cooperation and counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in different countries of the world, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) was introduced by the US President, Joe Biden. With fourteen members, the IPEF represents around 40 per cent of the global GDP (White House Briefing, 2022).

The purpose of creating the Quad and AUKUS, including two major defence programs by the US is to demonstrate its military presence and readiness in the Indo-Pacific region. The US has not included India as a member of AUKUS but it has formed a new alliance with the UAE, Israel, and India. Although there is no official name for it, the US refers to it as I2U2 in a statement, where I stand for India, Israel, and U stands for both U.A.E. and the US (Kumaraswamy, 2022). On the contrary, the US and India are on opposite sides of the Quad. Its primary objective in the Pacific is to confront China, while in the Indian or Arabian Sea, it is to confront Iran.

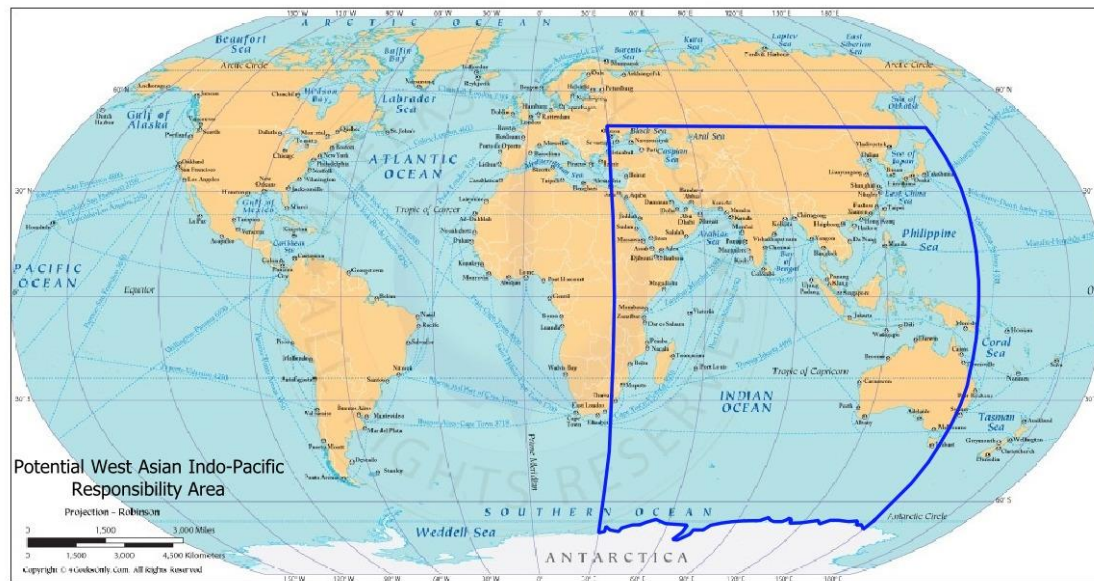
It is important to note that, China is a significant player not just in the Pacific region but in the Indian Ocean including the Arabian Sea which is emerging as its strategic partner. Hence, Iran and China have strong and stable ties. A comprehensive strategic agreement between China and Iran was inked in 2020, with an emphasis on security and the economy. To strengthen the partnership, China invested around US\$400 billion in the Iranian energy sector. Despite opposition from the US and India, all the West Asian nations, including the UAE, established strategic ties with China (Kabir, 2022). In March 2023, China was successful in negotiating a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran. As a result, both countries have agreed to open diplomatic ties with each other. This is seen as a big boost to China's image as an international negotiator. Therefore, this

engagement can be strategic and may be used to counter US Indo-Pacific strategy in the region. In this situation, West Asia's position is crucial for shaping the developments in the Indo-Pacific region and inversely. Also, the region's policies towards the Indo-Pacific will determine the politics within the region. It can influence the politics of the countries of the Indo-Pacific region, especially Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei as a result of its geographic location and its historical, cultural and economic ties with them. Bangladesh is not a part of the WAR but benefits from its partnership with the region. It also has ties with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region except the Indo-Pacific, Africa, and Europe are the areas where the WAR has partners and exerts much influence.

Thanks to recent developments related to the dominance and stability of the Indo-Pacific region, now in the form of isolated China, the WAR also has an alternate region for economic and security engagements. All parties involved in the Indo-Pacific region are now attempting to identify and create their own spheres of influence. Additionally, they have also listed their primary and secondary regional interests. In this process, to further its strategic interests, the US excludes Pakistan from its Indo-Pacific strategy, which covers the whole Pacific and the Indian Ocean up to 77° E longitude. In order to define its Indo-Pacific sphere of responsibility, Japan includes a larger territory. It encompasses the whole area of the Pacific, as well as the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, the northern Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean up to 30° E longitude. The Indo-Pacific region is demarcated by Australia as lying between 30° E and 180° E of longitude and up to 30° N of latitude. Meanwhile, India defines it as an area lying between 15° N and 30° S latitude and 45° E and 150° E longitude (Fig. 3). China is attempting to progressively control the Indo-Pacific region through numerous economic and strategic initiatives. Malaysia and Indonesia are two ASEAN nations that have not yet specified the geographic boundaries of their respective spheres of authority in the Indo-Pacific region (SWP, 2020).



**Figure 3: Potential Reasonability Area in Indo-Pacific for West Asian Countries**



**Source:** Based on <https://www.burningcompass.com/store/product/world-sea-route-map/>

The West Asian nations also have not indicated their interest in the affairs of the Indo-Pacific region either collectively or individually. The Indo-Pacific region is crucial for West Asia as a trading partner whilst equally important for security reasons because of their old civilizational and regional partnerships. It is a known fact that China is making an attempt to take control of the Pacific region and the Indo-Pacific in particular (The Economic Times. 2023, May 3). Chinese dominance in the region may affect the free flow of trade, navigation and communication. Therefore, it is advantageous for the West Asian nations to collaborate with regional and other countries to keep the Indo-Pacific region free from the rivalry of big powers and make it safer and free for all the countries. West Asian nations will be directly impacted by the new strategic thinking of the West and the emergence of a rivalry between China and the Quad countries (Cannon.Brendon J, 2020). In the strategic thinking of every major stakeholder in the region including India, Japan, Australia, and the US, the seas adjacent to West Asia are seen as a region of reasonability, strategic importance, or sphere of influence. Therefore, both parties will make efforts to control or dominate the West Asian marine space in accordance with their strategic objectives and priorities. The time is ripe now for the nations of West Asia to jointly define their areas of interest also and establish accountability in the strategic Indo-Pacific region(asiasociety, n.d). West Asia can also form a new alliance with Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, and other countries to protect its interests in the region. For this purpose, West Asian nations will require a capable fleet as well as a cohesive command and strategy to define their roles and interests in the region.

## **ELEMENTS OF SEA POWER, AND WEST ASIAN NAVAL STRATEGY**

Founder of the US naval strategy and a great exponent of achieving sea power rather than land power, Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) explained the elements of sea power and concluded that history is determined by using and controlling sea routes. Sea routes are open in all directions and are very easy and cheap despite familiar and unfamiliar dangers. Mahan identified six principal conditions to become a sea-based power.

1. Geographical position
2. Physical conformation, including, as connected therewith, natural productions and climate
3. Extent of territory
4. Population
5. Character of the people
6. Character of the government, including therein the national institutions

### **1. Geographic position**

The location and geography of West Asia make it a unique region like that of the US. But it is more strategically located because, in the west and northwest it is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea, and is close to southern and central Europe and North Africa. In the south, it has a vast Indian Ocean and is very close to important trade routes. The important part of West Asian geography is that there are not many rivers and inland water channels; therefore, the enemy cannot easily penetrate deep into the territory like in Europe and US. On its western and southwestern sides are the Red Sea and the strategic Suez Canal route. It can play an important role in eastern Africa through the Red Sea and commanding huge economic and cultural influence. Connectivity with the Mediterranean Sea gives it the legitimacy to participate in European and African affairs.

Furthermore, the WAR is surrounded by six seas. In its north, it is connected with the Black Sea, which is very important to connect with Russia, Ukraine, and East European countries. In the northeast it is connected with the Caspian Sea, connecting the region with Russia, Azerbaijan and other Central Asian countries. In the west, the region is connected with eastern Africa through the Red Sea. If the WAR identifies or unites itself as a single region based on geography, history, culture, and religion, it can emerge as the most effective geostrategic springboard to expand its influence in global geopolitics. In the present shape and system, it is the playground for big powers' geopolitical games. Therefore, it needs to be established itself as a player and partner in other regions. Mahan further argued that because of geography, Britain has an advantage over France. He had concluded that the expansion of open waters on the eastern and western sides of the US will be a cause of great weakness or strength for it. In the same

manner, the geography of the WAR in the absence of political unity will be a problem because all big powers surround it and try to influence and control the region according to their military, economy, and ideological agenda (Fig. 4). The political unity, collective response and pursuance of the common ideal will certainly make the region a powerful player in global politics.

The emergence of European countries as sea power is often argued as a result of their geography. Many experts argue that land routes and strategic positions were dominated by Islamic powers and there was little chance to penetrate them successfully; therefore, Europeans tried to search some new avenues for trade and influence. These efforts were successful and subsequently divided and weakened the Islamic world. They also discovered America in this process. John Mackinder (1861-1947) suggested that Western civilization and its interest may be threatened not by the sea but by land powers which he had identified as the heartland. US strategist Nicholas Spykman (1893-1943) suggested controlling the surrounding seas of the heartland to strengthen the security of the West and the US. Therefore, in both strategies (Heartland and Rimland), the WAR occupies an important place. However, this importance is defined as maintaining Western hegemony in the world. West Asian countries do not have an idea of their own global order and ways and means of promoting it and influencing Western geographies to defend their interests. The WAR does not have deep geographies like Russia, China, India, and the US, but it has medium-range geostrategic or geographic depth; therefore, its strategy cannot be dependent only on the land bases, but it needs a huge defence and friendly circle in its nearby as well as far-flung seas.

## **2. Physical conformation**

The territorial seas are the frontiers of countries having long coastal zones. If any country or region has a long seaboard, to ports and harbours, it gives enormous strength to it. The number of seaports and harbours are symbols of wealth and strength. It shows people's tendency to be open to sea-based civilisational processes, including business and trade. It also defines their military and defence approach toward the sea. Great Britain, a former global power, still operates in more than 520 ports and harbours, including 120 cargo handling ports, (Murray, n.d.) while Saudi Arabia, which has two sides of the sea in the East and West, only has 20 ports and harbours (Bhattacharjee, 2022). In the WAR, only Turkey has a competent number of 200 ports and harbors (Kudalak, et al., 2019). Though in wartime it may be a cause of difficulty, it also indicates the cultural aspect of any nation and region. According to Mahan, physical conditions either give a region or country strength and power or make them completely powerless.



Figure 4: US presence in West Asian Indo-Pacific



Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/10/infographic-us-military-presence-around-the-world-interactive>

The Indo-Pacific side of West Asia gives the region a unique strength, it is open from three sides and protected by choke points like the strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb. Historically, sea routes have played an important role during ancient and medieval times. West Asia emerged as a great power partly because of sea routes. Later, European powers emerged as a result of new technologies and search for markets and the development of trade routes. West Asia lost its place and became a vessel state/region of the West for a very long time. The US invasion of Iraq has indicated that despite strong geography, Iraq failed to protect itself because it had an inferior navy. The US understands the strategic importance of the Navy and maintains ten bases (four military, three air force, and three navy) in the region (Haddad, 2021). These bases have played the most important role in maintaining US hegemony in the region and world. According to some experts, this region is the most strategically located, therefore, it is necessary for the US to control it to maintain its hegemony.

The US naval presence in the region is significant as it includes its fifth fleet commands office and the United States Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) with the responsibility of patrolling and controlling the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Gulf of Oman.

### **3. Extent of territory**

The sea-based strategy requires that a country or region should have a significant land area. It also depends on the length of the coastline and the character of the harbours. According to Mahan (1889, 43), *“As regards the development of sea power, it is not the total square miles area of which a country, but the length of its coastline and the character of its harbours that are to be considered. It is to be said that, the geographical and physical conditions being the same, the extent of the sea coast is a source of strength or weakness according to the size of the population. A country is like a fortress; the garrison must be proportioned to the enceinte.”* The coastal length of the WAR is not long like the US and India but is compact and medium in length. If a proper strategy and required resources are available, the region cannot be defended easily because of its three sides give it a strategic and cultural depth and the marine side can be easily defended. During the gulf wars, the region collapsed quickly because of political division, an inferior and untrained navy, and old technology. Geography can be supported, but not the political conditions. To defend itself and play a proactive role, the WAR needs a multilayer strategy based on threat perception and operational ability. Therefore, the full extent of the combined coastal line of the region needs political consolidation and unity; otherwise, the region will continue to suffer defeat and humiliation.

### **4. Population**

As discussed earlier, Mahan had also said that to become a sea power, the sea should be in the attitude, character, and profession of a nation. He also concluded that in the French-Britain wars, France was numerically in a better position. However, based on the development of the sea-based character and profession, Britain was in a better position, and, therefore, won many battles. It is also to specify that a large and sizable population is not enough, but it should be professionally trained and equipped to create and maintain a large and competent navy. The WAR population is nearly 280 million which is comparable to the US population of 335 million. According to some estimates, by 2030, the WAR population will be more than 320 million, by 2050 it will further increase to more than 382 million, slightly surpassing the projected population of the US (Worldometer, 2022). However, despite the similarities in population size, there is a huge gap on the bases of economic development, knowledge attainment, population character, governance, and military power. For the last hundred years, the US has been leading the world in terms of power and development. In recent history, no other country or region has tried to build so powerful and long-range navy. During the Ottoman period, Turkey tried to create a competent navy, but Europe's technological revolution increased the gap and with time, Turkey lost the competition against European powers. Iran has a good number of submarines but fewer than North Korea. Not a single country in the region possesses a single nuclear submarine (Haddad, M. 2021)

The reason for this situation is not only economic but also the lack or even absence of sea-based culture and character. Turkey also has a good navy, but it is part of NATO, and individually it concentrates or gives priority to only the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea. The whole region, including Turkey, needs to be more ambitious to create a sea-based strategy and design and define global politics. The Indo Pacific is a vast region that needs enormous human resources with a high level of training and technology. In war or any crisis, reserves always play a significant role which comes from culture. The WAR is passing through many violent crises, and many fighter groups are available for resistance against invaders. There are also conditions of civil wars. It is because of land-based war and long historical conflict perception. Therefore, there is no excitement in the region about sea-based conflict and its preparedness.

In any land-based conflict, reserves may be available because of culture and mindset, but in any sea-based conflict, it will be very difficult. It is also important that military strength does not come from its military structure or weapons but from the aspirations of the people that create it. Mahan pointed out that *“If there be, as is everywhere, a supreme factor in war, it behooves countries whose genius is essentially not military, whose people, like all free people, object to pay for large military establishments, to see to it that they are at least strong enough to gain the time necessary to turn the spirit and capacity of their subjects into the new activities which war calls for, create a sea-based strategy, defend its interests, and fulfill its responsibility”* (Mahan, 1889). The WAR needs to change its security and strategic approach at a fundamental level and promote the sea-based culture among its people. It also required vast economic, resources and stability. He had also concluded that *“it may be admitted that a great population following callings related to the sea is, now as formerly, a great element of sea power; that the United States is deficient in that element; and that its foundations can be laid only in a large commerce under her own flag”* (Mahan, 1889, 49).

## **5. National character**

This character is not about right and wrong, morality and immorality, and sin and virtue, but about the aptitude for sea merchandise, business, trade, and their methods of doing. It is also about how the people of a particular country and region look at their business and trade beyond their borders. However, Mahan discussed the cases of the colonial period and analyzed the approaches of contemporary colonial and sea powers like Holland, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Britain, and France. However, as the aptitude and approaches are concerned, these are also relevant in the current times because they not only set the priority of the people but give them insight into the overall thinking of the people. Since ancient times, Arabs and people of the WAR have been considered great traders, merchants, and seafarers. They were famous for land and sea-based trade and travelling long distances in search of business and wealth. During 300 BC, Arab traders established major sea trader routes between India, East Asia, and Europe (Ebrahim, 2020). Nevertheless, land trade increased enormously after Islam and the significant change in people’s faith. In the medieval period, European traders dominated the sea with an advanced navy. This domination is continuing, with the exception of China which has successfully emerged and challenges the European and US domination to some extent. After the political division of the region and the discovery of oil, the nature and character

of the region have drastically changed, and it is majorly dependent on income from oil and gas supply. Turkey is the only exception to it as it does not have oil and gas in huge amounts. After its independence, it had also become a close ally of Europe both in trade and politics. Through, the region is struggling to create non-energy economic options, but low levels of education, research, and technological development are not allowing it to happen. The region is far behind in the compression of these parameters from the leading economies. Though, it is also true that in the present era of high economic cost, it will not be easy for the region to establish itself as a sea power. The region must diversify and develop in respect of all parameters. It will boost trade through sea and give it the legitimacy to engage Indo-Pacific also.

Mahan (1889, 53) also analyzed the case of all major colonial powers. According to him, Britain was the most successful colonial power because it had developed long-range and long-term trade through the sea. He argued *“The tendency to trade, involving of necessity the production of something to trade with, is the national characteristic most important to the development of sea power. Granting it and a good seaboard, it is not likely that the dangers of the sea, or any aversion to it, will deter a people from seeking wealth by the paths of ocean commerce.”* To emerge as sea-based power or maintain a powerful presence in the global sea, it needs to develop some personal character as well, he had identified these specialities of character as *“.....bold, enterprising, temperate, patient of suffering, enthusiastic, and gifted with intense national feeling.”* These characteristics cannot be developed individually and quickly; they need deliberative political and social leadership efforts for a long time. The WAR is passing through a phase of conflicting changes, and the people of the region want to emerge as successful and influential. If the political leaderships decide to unite according to the common agenda to be influential sea power, it can really make a change at the fundamental level.

## **6. Character of the government**

In policy matters, there is a difference between ‘the national character and the character of the government.’ The character of government and its institutions have impacted and influenced the grand strategy, including the development of the sea power of any country. Mahan concluded that the ‘characters’ of the government, rulers and their institutions have a marked influence on their development as a sea power. He suggested that if any country aspired to be a sea power, then its quest should be continuity in policy and strategy and should take the lead in the pursuance of this from other countries, including powerful enemies and allies. He stated *“It would seem improbable that a government in full accord with the natural bias of its people would most successfully advance its growth in every respect; and, in the matter of sea power, the most brilliant successes have followed where there has been intelligent direction by a government fully imbued with the spirit of the people and conscious of its true general bent. Such a government is most certainly secured when the will of the people, or of their best natural exponents, has some large share in making it; but such free governments have sometimes fallen short, while on the other hand despotic power, wielded with judgment and consistency, has created at times great sea commerce and a brilliant navy with greater directness than can be reached by the slower processes of a free people. The difficulty in the latter case is to*

*ensure perseverance after the death of a particular despot*” (Mahan,1889). The real gap between the West Asian countries and other leading regional and global power is very high (Table 1). It indicates that the region is not serious about threats and competition from other powers. Even the gulf war and the presence of the US on their soil have not motivated the countries of the region to build a world-class navy and have a common foreign policy. Only Turkey has a relatively good navy and focuses on indigenous military shipbuilding, but it is not a challenge to the European, US, and Chinese navies. Iran has some ambitions, but due to sanctions, it is also far behind in the development and deployment of advanced technology. Iran also has problematic regional policies and is not so committed to cooperating with its neighbours and having a collective vision. After the refusal of the US and the West's demand to increase oil output, Iran is under real threat to its security. US's aggressive gestures and language also indicate that danger to the people and establishments is inevitable. Iran and Turkey have shown their displeasure against the US' harsh language against Saudi and other Gulf countries. This response indicates that if Saudi Arabia responds positively to this move, the region can initiate collective regional security measures, and the navy will play a very important role in the region.

The politics of West Asia is not in a sense as liberal and democratic as in Europe and US. Here, governments' ambitions and priorities regarding defence and security cannot be comprehended easily. However, as the threat from the sea is real and powerful and with the present inferior navy, it is impossible to counter it aggressively. The governments of the region with their resources and institutions need to come together with their sea-based ambitions and commitments. The character of the government also determines its diplomatic efforts to maintain regional unity and shared understanding for security issues which is lacking in the WAR. Unfortunately, the region does not have a rich and successful naval history in the recent past. Most Gulf states came into existence after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and are still considered client states or close strategic allies of the US and Europe. However, some countries of the region are trying to be more independent in their global affairs and reducing their dependency on the USA and other countries. However, it is not an easy task because the region is not united and technologically advanced to challenge the US presence and pressure. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are trying to engage China in the region (Borger, 2021). Though, China is not in a position where it can act and intervene decisively in any security emergency in the region. Saudi Arabia is indicating to join the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries (TASS, 2022). Still, it will also not solve the problem, but rather make it more complex as BRICS countries cannot support West Asia since this block is divided are a part of the US and Europe's security approaches and operations.

The recent drift between Saudi Arabia and Qatar shows the immaturity of the Saudi ruling establishment. Saudi Arabia and UAE's Role in Egypt is also totally against the security interests of the region as with its locational advantages, resources, and population, this country can play the role of a powerhouse in West Asian security. However, after derailing democracy and crushing independent political power, Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen, or 'The Muslim Brotherhood' has increased the security risk in region. Therefore, the character of the WAR governments should be pro-sea and politically independent and regionally united. A free political environment creates debate

which brings to the fore the genuine aspirations of people. They should also cooperate to create common security and threat perceptions in case of any emergency. To defend its interests, the WAR first should try to identify and mark the area of interest in the Indo-Pacific region. The WAR should also draw the red line for the presence of regional and global powers' navies. They should follow the principle of 'Jomini' as Mahan described for Europe and suggested for the US “*He lays down, as a fundamental principle of European policy, that an unlimited expansion of naval force should not be permitted to any nation which cannot be approached by land, —a description which can apply only to Great Britain*”. It depends on the attitude and strategic approach of different western educated kings and princes and how they are impressed by challengers and potential enemies. Mahan cites the example of Holland, that, for a long time, Holland was a far superior naval power. Even in the 17th century (1674) it was much ahead of England and France combined power. But after some time, Holland lost its place (Mahan, 1889, 69).; Mahan blamed the government character and policy for it; he pointed out “.... *fall of Holland proceeded, not necessarily from her inferior size and numbers, but from faulty policy on the part of the two governments. It does not concern us to decide which was the more to blame*” (Mahan, 1889, 69).

## **INDO-PACIFIC AREA OF INTERESTS AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR WEST ASIAN COUNTRIES**

The location of West Asia gives a unique advantage in this region, simultaneously making it vulnerable. In history, the region was dominated by many powers and empires. In recent times also, it was dominated by the West, and now the US dominates the region. Due to the present tension between the West, China and Russia, the importance of the region is growing, and each power block is trying to dominate the region. India is also increasing its engagement in the region for strategic, economic, historical, civilizational, and ideological reasons. In this situation, it is reiterated again that the WAR's countries need to define their area of interest and responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific region to defend their interests and increase influence. All major and emerging countries, especially coastal areas of the region, have to define their area of interest and responsibility. These major powers of the world will try to dominate or influence the West Asian Sea to defend their interests. This situation will directly threaten the security of West Asia. The Indo-Pacific region is also volatile, and many regional and global disputes are taking shape in this region. Not only regional countries but global powers and alliances are also trying to strengthen their position in the region.

There are three dimensions of the naval area of interest and responsibility for the West Asian countries to defend them. First is the ideological and cultural, second is the economic and trade and the third is strategic significance. The WAR has an ideological and cultural interest in the Indo-Pacific region as significant Muslim populations live in the Indo-Pacific region, and in an emergency, they look towards the West Asian countries for support. Recently, in many countries where Muslims are in the minority, they are facing persecution and human rights violations, especially in China, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. In the absence of strong military powers in West Asia, justice cannot be



provided to these Muslim communities; therefore, a critical presence of their naval power is compulsory in the Indo-Pacific region. These aspects also legitimize the presence and intervention of their navy in the Indo-Pacific region. Protecting the value of humanity and acting and intervening beyond their community is also essential, so protecting the value not at the global level but in their interests is also important. For that, west Asian countries need to develop their navy and capacity to utilize it in times of emergency.

Many West Asian countries depend on oil and gas export; therefore, the security of sea routes is important to transport their products in the international markets. During conflict and war-like situations, this supply line can be disrupted. Many consumer countries take responsibility for the security of the oil and gas supply, but a strong navy is still needed for wartime to support their consumers and trade partners. All strong economic powers always have strong military powers or alliances with strong military blocks. All major countries of the Indo-Pacific region are consumers of West Asian energy resources; therefore, the WAR countries need to maintain strong and capable navies not only in the Indian Ocean but in South China, the Sea of Japan, the Philippine Sea in the Pacific Ocean around 150° E longitude.

Despite all efforts for centuries, the global security order is still anarchic. Every single country or region must arrange its security. Sometimes the security of a state depends on its area, population, and economic size. If a country is small in area and population, it is vulnerable. It will depend on others for instance it may become a client state of another big power. In this situation, collective regional security is the best option. NATO's security structure is an example of providing security to small and weak countries of Europe.

Both geographic area and population wise most West Asian countries are very small. The region is divided into some tiny countries like Bahrain and Qatar. Therefore, the region needs a shared or collective security arrangement. To protect the region, an assessment of threat perception is also necessary, for the same reason finding potential allies and partners is also crucial for the potential security arrangement. Due to the power struggle in the Indo-Pacific region, all big powers want the support of West Asian countries for their security structure and arrangements. Some strategic and globally significant marine trade routes like the Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Straits of Hormuz are located in West Asia (The Economist, 2015). These routes are important for the Indo-Pacific region also. Therefore, to protect the region, there is a need to create a defence or security circle up to the maximum level according to threat and cooperation perception. The responsibility region for security may also be divided into many smaller areas extending up to 150° E longitude east as its last limit. Because after this limit there is the open Pacific Sea and the US already dominates the region. Therefore, the WAR should try to create its capacity to make its presence in all areas of the Indo-Pacific at the level to counter any threat long before it reaches its borders.

As a first step or stage, despite their regional differences, the West Asian countries should create a shared understanding of threats and cooperation. European countries have many differences, but in the matter of security of Europe, they are united. Therefore, the WAR countries should also cooperate with each other and with non-

regional powers also for their common and collective security structure. Though many countries of West Asia cooperate with the West, some of them are officially part of their alliance, but there is a need for multi-vector and multi-alliance engagement. Recently, the UAE became part of a US-led Quad with India and Israel as its added members. The region also cooperates with China, but naval cooperation with Russia is nearly negligible. After a shared understanding of the threat, they should create a structure and command at the operation level. A united assessment of total assets and the gaps should be studied and filled in a systematic manner and with cooperation.

## NAVAL STRENGTH OF WEST ASIAN COUNTRIES

The Indo-Pacific is a vast region, and some of the most powerful, developed, and big economies belong to this region. As US and China struggle to dominate the region, India is also turning itself toward the West to counter China in the Asia Pacific. Both US and China have massive and very advanced navies, while West Asian countries are far behind in these parameters. It is not only the US, but Australian, Indian, and Japanese navies are also coming together to counter China and dominate the region. During any military conflict, all members of NATO will be part of any defensive and offensive move in the Asia-Pacific region. In response, China is also developing its navy and technology including aircraft carriers and highly advanced weapon systems. The weakness of West Asian countries may create a situation similar to the period of the first and second world wars when these countries were sandwiched between big powers and later were divided according to the political and geostrategic agendas of their colonial masters. Strategically, west Asia is an essential part of the European-led geopolitical thinking of ‘Heartland’ and the US-led geostrategic structure of ‘Rimland’; therefore, it will continue as the top priority of both strategic settings. With the struggle between the West; Russia and China, both powers will ultimately try to dominate the West Asia region for their military and strategic advantage. To defend its sea and area, the region needs to develop new approaches and strategies.

**Table-1: Total naval strength of West Asian countries**

Rank	Country	Naval Strength (Personnel)	Aircraft Carriers	Helicopter Carriers (LPH, LHA, LHD)	Aircraft Destroyers	Frigates	Corvettes	Sub-marines	Patrol Boats	Main Warfare	Total Assets
13	Turkey	45,000	0	0	0	16	10	12	35	11	156
22	Iran	18,000	0	0	0	7	3	19	66	1	152
45	Iraq	3,000	0	0	0	2	0	0	26	0	63

60	Syria	4,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	7	43
44	Israel	9,500	0	0	0	0	7	5	45	0	67
NA	Palestine	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
74	Jordan	700	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	0	27
50	Saudi Arabia	13,500	0	0	0	7	4		39	3	57
67	Yemen	1700	0	0	0	0	2	0	15	3	35
79	Oman	4200	0	0	0	0	5	0	12	0	22
38	Qatar	10,000	0	0	0	0	4	0	20	0	86
41	UAE	3000	0	0	0	0	9	0	38	2	79
26	Kuwait	2700	0	0	0	0	0	0	106	0	123
<b>Total</b>		<b>115,300</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>894</b>

**Source:** Based on: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/navy-ships.php>

Not a single country in West Asia has either an aircraft carrier, a helicopter carrier, or even a destroyer. Submarines, which play a great role in naval warfare and strategy, are also almost absent in the region. China and India have two and one carrier, respectively. The US already has the biggest-ever fleet of aircraft and helicopter carriers. A carrier has the capacity for long-range operations and offence against the enemy. The region as a whole has only 36 submarines, half of the total number of the North Korean fleet. Only three countries, Iran, Turkey, and Israel, have these submarines. There is no nuclear submarine in the region. There are only six countries which have nuclear submarines. India and China, are the only two Asian countries that have nuclear submarines. In contrast, the US has a vital presence in the region with the most extensive fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. After the AUKUS agreement, Australia will be the seventh country in the world and the fourth country in the region with a nuclear-powered submarine. Though the relations between Israel and Gulf countries are improving, it cannot be made a part of a combined or collective security vision because of political, historical, and ideological reasons.

To develop a great navy, Mahan advised the revival of the models of the French navy as well as the role and character of its government and administration. When Louis XIV took the government into his own hands in 1661, French Navy was very weak in comparison to its main rivals Britain and Holland. However, after his policy and reforms, France created a more extensive and powerful navy. Louis XIV appointed Jean-Baptiste Colbert, as secretary of state for the navy. Colbert had worked under Richelieu, who is considered the virtual founder father of the French navy. After Colbert's skilful and genius leadership, French naval power grew very fast. When he took office in 1661, there were only thirty armed ships, of which only three had over sixty guns, but in 1666 it increased to seventy, including fifty ships of the line and twenty fire ships, and in 1671 it reached one hundred ninety-six. Mahan described the role of government and noted *"the chief part played by the government in building up the sea power of the State, and that this very great man looked not to any one of the bases on which it rests to the exclusion of the others, but embraced them all in his wise and provident administration"* (Mahan, 1889, 71). The French naval revival indicates that if the government and its institutions show the will, a great navy can be built in less time. The WAR needs a genius political, military, and administrative leadership to build a world-class navy to secure its interest in Indo-Pacific and beyond.

## **THE IDEA OF COLLECTIVE NAVAL SECURITY IN WEST ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION**

As is indicated by the data (Table 1), west Asian countries have comparatively a smaller number of naval assets, even though some countries only have patrol boats only, showing the limitation of their naval capabilities. To defend their area and proposed area of responsibility, it needs both, an advanced and big navy. It also needs a collective security consensus with an objective of collective consciousness to defend it. Though the WAR never had an ideal unity, its history has been very much fragile full of clashes and wars. However, European history is also full of wars and conflict. Even the most brutal and bloody wars have happened in Europe, but they are now united and have collective ideas and interests. The idea of common security is that friends can be changed and chosen but not neighbours. The problem with the WAR's common security is that there is no consensus about a common political idea to defend collectively. The West and US justify all their military aggression in the name of defending democracy, liberalism, and freedom. However, their actions have practical contradictions and hidden agendas for global hegemony. The WAR needs a common political idea to defend it in every condition and every corner of the world. There are many ambiguities in the idea of national interests, and on this topic, public debates and people participations are either zero or very limited. Only Turkey has a culture of open debates on different issues. For the development of collective security order, there is a need to create a collective political idea after debate and discussion.

Politics in the WAR region should be more pro-people and open, where people can debate politics, including security. Then, consensus on political ideas will justify their military engagement globally including the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. West

Asia is the core of Islamic civilization, and its major part also extends into the Asia-Pacific, including Malaysia, and Indonesia through Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The post-liberal political situation and the emergence of aggressive, violent militant nationalism has created many security threats to West Asia and Islamic civilization. The region is already suffering from the mysterious ISIS terrorism, sectarian violence, civil wars, and foreign invasions. If this situation continues, it can further perpetuate violence in the region. To mitigate this situation, there is a need to create a civilization-based political idea that can address people's aspirations, and consciousness, including security.

Many experts deliberated upon the idea of regional security, including military, economic, political, social, and environmental. Historically, only the NATO and Warsaw Pact provided military security to their members. After the collapse of the USSR, Warsaw Pact was dismantled, and now NATO is the only organization that provides such guarantee security to member states.

In the post-cold period, many regional organizations emerged, like CSO, CSTO, and BRICS, but they could not ensure the military security guarantee. Historically, West Asia has been a part of many alliances during the cold war; at present, it is not a part of any significant military alliance. Recently, UAE joined the US-led quad, but it is not a NATO-like security pact giving guarantees to its members. The basic principle of regional security structure and cooperation is that members of any alliance should not engage in war, or conflicts, supporting any opponent of any country of regional alliance. In the current situation, the region is passing through many internal and external security challenges, and different states are engaging against each other to help militant groups and external powers. Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq are examples of discord and disunity where regional countries peruse their brutal national interests ignoring much bigger and beneficial regional and civilizational interests. To play any role in the Indo-Pacific region, all the countries of the WAR would have to become united and cooperate to create a collective and standard security setup and structure.

## **COOPERATION WITHIN REGION**

There are three primary possible arguments for cooperation in the WAR countries. First, they should not allow any permanent naval base in the region. Second, cooperation with the US and other global and regional powers should continue on an equal basis. The US and other non-regional presence should be reduced in the waters of the region because their presence is becoming a threat rather than security. Iran is the only concern for most Arab Gulf countries, but if these countries and Iran resolve their issues and disputes, the logic and the reason for the heavy dependence on the US will be drastically reduced. The US policy is to make Gulf countries dependent on her and not let them become independent and powerful. As Saudi Arabia has increased its military cooperation with China, the move has been criticized by the US and as retaliation, it has removed its missile defence batteries from the country (Al Jazeera, 2021, September 11). Though the West Asian countries should cooperate with the US, the main focus should be building their naval strength and reducing US presence. Finally, they should increase their

cooperation with all regional countries, including India, China, Indonesia, South Korea, North Korea, and Japan. Russia is very much part of the Pacific region and already has a naval base in Syria. Though Russia is not deeply engaged in the Indo-Pacific naval game for the balance of power. The WAR countries should invite Russia to cooperate and engage in Indo-Pacific affairs, especially near their waters. China already has a strategic partnership with Iran and increasing cooperation with UAE as well. In January 2022, Iran conducted a naval exercise with Russia and China (Middle East Monitor, 2022, October 13). In the future other countries of West Asia should also invite them with a focus to cooperate at the regional level and counter potential threats.

China is also emerging as a valid partner of the Gulf security architects and Indo-Pacific security structure to protect its investment through the Belt and Road initiative. Security of the Gulf and Indo-Pacific region is vital for Chinese interests as most of the oil supply routes for China pass through these regions. Therefore, as a regional country with global ambitions, Chinese presence will continue in the region. Therefore, west Asian countries should give priority to developing strategic ties with China to make the Indo-Pacific region more secure and protect their area of interest and responsibility. India is also an emerging power and has historical and geographical proximity to the WAR. It is also a traditional trade ally of the region, and increasing engagement with China may make her uneasy. Therefore, there is a need to develop a mechanism that helps to develop a balanced relationship with both of these countries. The recent revelation of China building a naval base in the UAE shows the deep engagement between both of these countries. India's other concern is Pakistan and its close relations with the region. It should also be managed tactically. At present, Pakistan is not powerful enough to balance the Indian influence in the region, therefore, the West Asian countries may give priority to India in their regional naval strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite the many efforts and hopes, the international or global order is anarchic. Events of the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine indicate that the region's countries have to manage their military security independently. The WAR is the most strategic area in global politics both with the perspectives of land power and sea power or heartland and rimland. Historically and traditionally, the US has been dominating the Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific region. But, with the emergence of China as a global power and challenging the US domination, global the strategic game is changing. Many other regional powers, including India, Japan, and Australia, are coming together to counter the Chinese ambitions. Therefore, a new strategic scenario is emerging in the Indo-Pacific region. This is the right time for the West Asian countries to collectively define their area of interest and responsibility in the Indo-Pacific strategic region. Being an essential part of the Indian Ocean, the WAR may profoundly influence this changing strategic environment.

Historically, the WAR has always been a part of the West and US strategic influence. However, the emerging new strategic equation gives a chance to the WAR to



revisit its strategic vision of its region and that of the Indo-Pacific also. The region should try to politically unite itself as a single strategic region. To secure its strategic interests and to influence the Indo-Pacific strategic space, the region must change its politics, society and economy fundamentally. Alfred Thayer Mahan, the US naval historian and strategist has given six golden principles of becoming sea power. The WAR must change its old strategic vision and client states mentality and collects itself according to these principles. To secure its interests and play a decisive role in the Indo-Pacific region, it needs to develop its naval capabilities in comparison to other regional powers. To secure their strategic interest, the WAR countries first should try to reduce US heavy presence and must ensure not to allow any permanent foreign naval base on their waters. The WAR should continue its cooperation with US and European powers, but also develop proximity with China, Russia, India, and other regional powers. Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are the most influential countries in the region. However, because of some political and historical reasons, they are not on the same page for the region's security affairs. There is needed for the trio to come together to provide leadership to the region and increase their influence in the Indo-Pacific strategic competition.

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