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Q19

"Energy security constitutes the dominant kingpin of India's foreign policy, and is linked with India's overarching influence in Middle Eastern countries." How would you integrate energy security with India's foreign policy trajectories in the coming years?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS II · 15 marks · India and its Neighbourhood

India and its neighborhood - relations.

Core demand of the question

- Show why energy sits at the centre of India's Middle East ties
- Map oil, gas, diaspora, ports and minilaterals
- **Integrate energy security with future foreign-policy paths:** diversification, green, and strategic autonomy
- Do not ignore Iran-Israel-Red Sea risk

Revision summary

Imported crude and LNG make energy the hard core of India's Middle East policy, alongside diaspora and ports.

UAE CEPA, **I2U2**, IMEC and Chabahar are the diplomatic frame around tankers.

- **Risks:** Hormuz, Red Sea, Iran sanctions, OPEC+ and over-reliance on any one discount supplier.
- **Future integration:** diversified barrels and routes, Gulf green-hydrogen partnerships, naval sea-lane policy, multi-alignment among regional rivals.

The kingpin should shrink as the energy mix greener; it cannot be wished away this decade.

Introduction

India still runs on **imported molecules**. A large share of crude has long come from the **Gulf**. That fact makes energy the **kingpin of policy toward West Asia: not the only interest (five million workers, remittances, Chabahar, I2U2), but the one that would halt factories first if the Strait of Hormuz closed**. Foreign policy in the coming years has to keep the tankers moving while leaving the tank.

Body**The present kingpin**

Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE and others remain core suppliers even after the **Russia** spike of 2022-24. **Qatar** is LNG. **SPR** (strategic petroleum reserves) and **IEA-style** coordination are insurance, not a substitute for the Gulf. **ONGC Videsh** and long-term offtake contracts are diplomacy by barrel. The **rupee-dirham** and local-currency experiments are financial hedges around the same cargo.

• **Influence in the Middle East is reciprocal:** India needs oil; Gulf sovereigns need **labour, food, pharma, and a non-Western political friend**. **CEPA with UAE**, Saudi investment talks, and **I2U2** (India, Israel, UAE, US) sit on that bargain. **IMEC** (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) is a bet that **ports and rails** can also carry energy-adjacent trade if the Red Sea is stable.

Risks

Houthi attacks on shipping, **Iran-Israel** escalation, and **US sanctions** on Iran complicate **Chabahar** and any Iranian molecule. Over-dependence on a single Russian discount is a **European lesson** India has only half learned. OPEC+ cuts are sovereign acts, not market weather.

Trajectories to integrate

- **Diversify barrels:** Atlantic, Latin America, West Africa, and a **floor of domestic plus biofuel**, without pretending self-sufficiency in crude.
- **Diversify molecules:** longer LNG, green hydrogen **partnerships with the Gulf** (they have sun; India has demand and some tech), and **critical minerals** diplomacy that is energy-transition security.
- **Diversify routes:** east-coast **SPR**, Chabahar as **access not exclusive bet**, IMEC if security allows, and a navy that treats **sea lanes as a foreign-policy tool** (already the Indian Ocean story).
- **Political multi-alignment:** talk to **Riyadh, Tehran, Tel Aviv and Washington** without a loyalty test - the only way a buyer-State survives a fragmented West Asia.
- **Diaspora as energy politics:** evacuation capacity (**Yemen, Sudan**) is part of energy security because the same region holds both workers and wells.
- **Climate club:** a Gulf-India **green grid / hydrogen** story keeps influence when the last barrel is unfashionable.

Energy security as kingpin must **narrow** over two decades, or India will remain a price-taker in someone else's war. Until then, West Asia policy that ignores tankers is literature.

Flow diagram

Energy security -> Gulf barrels LNG
 Energy security -> Sea lanes SPR
 Future -> Diversify
 Future -> Hydrogen minerals
 Future -> Multi-align

Conclusion

Gulf crude still pins India's West Asia policy. The coming trajectory is diversified supply, green molecules with the same partners, protected sea lanes, and autonomy among rivals. Influence will track how well India buys, ships and eventually substitutes that barrel.

Facts & figures

Strait of Hormuz

Chokepoint through which a large share of seaborne Gulf oil (and thus Indian imports) must pass.

I2U2

India, Israel, UAE and the United States minilateral, spanning technology, food and energy-adjacent investment.

SPR

India's strategic petroleum reserves, a buffer, not a replacement for diversified long-term supply.

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