

Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) was first suggested by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 14th East Asian Summit. It is also part of the SAGAR mission to expand and facilitate regional cooperation of India's maritime neighbours.

This article will further elaborate upon the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative within the context of the IAS Exam

What is the aim of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative?

The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative's objective is to strengthen maritime boundaries. To this end partnerships based on the principle of free trade and sustainable use of maritime resources is stressed upon.

A partnership between 'like-minded' nations is the core principle of the IPOI. Such partnerships should have three common goals in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) which is wealth creation, welfare promotion and cooperative win-win strategies.

The proverbial cog in such mutual cooperation is to promote welfare via a democratic model of governance win by creating a rules-based order that promotes free trade and work together in order to create wealth.

Role of India in the IPOI

Regarding the Indo-Pacific Initiative, India has always had an approach which had ASEAN nations at its centre. It can be safely said that the IPOI is another extension of its 'Look-East' policy.

The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative also underlines other core components of this strand of thought in two ways.

1. India's model for the Indo-Pacific argues for a multipolar region. It has maintained a balance in the region that seeks to be adversarial to none. To its advantage, its approach has been credited as non-confrontational and inclusive.
2. It fits with India's aspirations in the region. The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative talks of a similar network of engagement with stakeholders that would be beneficial, keeping in mind the issues of security and sustainability.

Challenges regarding the Indo-Pacific Initiative

Like all every initiative the IPOI comes with its fair set of challenges.

The first challenge is if India can back the initiative with the political will and resources at hand. It has been challenged in India's foreign policy regarding the gap of its practice and theory. For example, Project Mausam is a counter to the Chinese Maritime Silk Road but it has yet to take off due to the roadblocks it has encountered. Part of the problem lies in the fact that India's focus is towards lies between the Straits of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca in the east. There is little interest in this region for US policymakers as they heavily favour the Pacific. Hence little collaboration has been seen between the US and India despite promises to the contrary.

The second challenge is regarding how any security measure in the region will be viewed by other countries in the region. It is a complicated picture as each nation will have its own interpretation and not all of them will necessarily align with India's interest. The balancing act between the US, China and Russia in itself seen as an uncertainty by the stakeholders of the Indo-Pacific region.

The recent withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) may have opened a Pandora's Box of sorts. Only time will tell what it means in the grand scheme of the Indo-Pacific Initiative.