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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# The Bombay School Returns — India's Gulf Diplomacy and the West Asia Realignment

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**8 April 2026 · **GS2**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# The Bombay School Returns — India's Gulf Diplomacy and the West Asia Realignment

The Indian Express

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## CONTEXT

The **Indian Express editorial** analyses India's recent assertive diplomatic positioning in support of Arab Gulf states — including publicly condemning Iranian retaliatory strikes on UAE and Saudi infrastructure — and argues this represents a **revival of the “Bombay School” of foreign policy** toward the Gulf. The editorial contextualises this as a strategic shift from India's traditional non-aligned, equidistance approach toward an openly **interest-based Gulf partnership**, shaped by **diaspora** connections, energy imports, and economic interdependence.

## THE EDITORIAL ARGUMENT

### 1. The “Bombay School” — What It Means

The editorial uses the “Bombay School” as a metaphor for a strain of **pragmatic, commerce-driven Indian foreign policy toward the Gulf** that dates to the pre-independence era. Bombay (now Mumbai) was the hub of the Indian Ocean trading network — merchants from Gujarat, coastal Maharashtra, and Kerala maintained deep economic links with Arab ports long before the British formalised these as diplomatic ties. This “school” subordinated ideology to commercial and diaspora interests.

The contrast is with **Jawaharlal Nehru's ideological non-alignment** — which maintained equidistance from all power blocs and sought solidarity with Arab nationalism (Nasser, Ba'athism, PLO) over strategic pragmatism.

### 2. The Current Shift — What India Did

In the current West Asia conflict, India:

- **Condemned Iranian retaliatory strikes** on UAE and Saudi infrastructure — explicitly siding with Gulf Arab states
- **Supported Arab state positions** at multilateral forums (UNSC, OIC observer)



- Deepened **I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA) cooperation**, now extending to security information sharing
- Maintained **Chabahar Port engagement** with Iran — but quietly, without high-profile diplomatic cover

The editorial notes this is a departure from traditional Indian equidistance — India previously maintained simultaneous ties with Iran (via INSTC and Chabahar) and Gulf states without explicitly favouring either in intra-regional disputes.

### 3. Why This Shift Is Strategic

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The editorial argues the shift is driven by five structural factors:

- 1 **Diaspora weight** — 9 million Indians in Gulf states; \$50+ billion annual remittances. Any disruption to Gulf stability directly harms India's economy and voters
- 2 **Energy dependence** — Gulf supplies ~60% of India's crude imports; disruption means macroeconomic shock
- 3 **Investment flows** — UAE sovereign wealth funds have committed \$100+ billion in India over 2021-2026 (ADIA, ADQ, Mubadala)
- 4 **Strategic convergence** — Gulf states share India's concern about Pakistan's nuclear programme and Afghanistan's Taliban governance
- 5 **Abraham Accords architecture** — India-Israel economic ties have deepened; I2U2 makes explicit the quad-alignment of India, Israel, UAE, USA

### 4. The Risks India Must Navigate

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The editorial warns the Bombay School approach carries risks:

- **Iran retaliation** — Iran can disrupt Chabahar access, INSTC connectivity, and energy supply through Strait of Hormuz
- **West Asia overcommitment** — being visibly aligned risks India being drawn into Gulf security architecture in ways that constrain strategic autonomy
- **PLO solidarity** — India's traditional support for Palestinian statehood (two-state solution) has become harder to articulate given deepening India-Israel-UAE ties



## INDIA'S STRUCTURAL INTERESTS IN WEST ASIA

INTEREST	SCALE / SIGNIFICANCE
Indian diaspora in Gulf	~9 million people
Annual remittances from Gulf	\$50+ billion
Crude oil imports from Gulf	~60% of total imports
UAE investment in India	\$100+ billion committed (2021-26)
Chabahar Port (Iran)	India's access to Afghanistan and Central Asia
I2U2 cooperation	Joint investments in water, energy, transport, food
Indian trade with UAE	\$85+ billion (India's 2nd largest trade partner)

## UPSC RELEVANCE

### GS Paper 2 — International Relations

- **India's West Asia policy** — diaspora diplomacy, energy security, strategic autonomy
- **I2U2 grouping** — composition, objectives, India's role
- **Non-Aligned Movement vs. Realpolitik** — evolution of India's foreign policy doctrine
- **Abraham Accords** — UAE-Israel normalisation and India's balancing act

### Mains Angle

“India's West Asia policy has evolved from non-aligned equidistance to pragmatic interest-based engagement. Critically analyse, with reference to the Bombay School of diplomacy and the Iran-Gulf conflict.” (GS2)



## FACTS CORNER

ITEM	FACT
“Bombay School”	Pragmatic, commerce+diaspora driven Gulf policy approach
I2U2 members	India, Israel, UAE, USA
Indian diaspora in Gulf	~9 million
Gulf remittances	\$50+ billion/year
Gulf share in India’s crude imports	~60%
UAE trade with India	\$85+ billion (India’s 2nd largest trade partner)
Chabahar Port	India’s strategic Iranian port – INSTC connectivity
Abraham Accords	UAE-Israel (Sept 2020), Bahrain-Israel (Sept 2020)
India’s PLO position	Supports two-state solution, Palestinian statehood
India’s Iran dilemma	INSTC + Chabahar vs Gulf energy + Abraham Accords alignment

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