

# The “Indo-Mediterranean”: Strategic Space in the Making

David Scott

## Structured Abstract

*Article Type:* Research Paper

*Purpose*—The purpose of this paper is to examine the arrival of the “Indo-Mediterranean” as an analytical concept shaping strategy formulations and directions by states.

*Design, Methodology, Approach*—Various *geo-* (derived from geography) theoretical tools are used for analyzing the arrival of the Indo-Mediterranean; namely the geo-strategies pursued by India, Turkey and Italy, followed by the application of geopolitics, geo-economics and geotechnology to this region.

*Findings*—The “Indo-Mediterranean” has emerged in the last five years as a strategic designator, explicitly with India and Italy, and seen in practice with Turkey. Concerning applicable theories, the divide between geopolitics and geo-economics is shown to be false. Geotechnology is introduced as a further geotheory. IR *realism* is driving alignment patterns and infrastructure initiatives.

*Originality/Value*—This paper represents the first academic study of the “Indo-Mediterranean” as a strategic concept and as strategy for states.

Keywords: geo, India, Indo-Mediterranean, Italy, maritime, Turkey

## I. Introduction

*We are witnessing the emergence of what might be termed the Indo-Mediterranean.*

—Narendra Modi and Giorgia Meloni, May 20, 2026

Once in a while, new geographic zones are coined, “envisaged” and applied. In what can be called “ideational technology,” a conceptual paradigm or mental map of a region

*Center for International Maritime Security & Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy  
Studies: davidscott366@outlook.com*



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shifts and shapes consequent policy and strategies.<sup>1</sup> Over a century ago, it was the arrival of the “Middle East,” coined during 1900–1903 by military figures like General Gordon and geopolitical theorists like Admiral Mahan, and popularized by journalists like Valentine Chirol with regard to the security of routes from the Mediterranean to India.<sup>2</sup> About 40 years ago, it was the turn of the “Asia-Pacific” and its economics-driven Pacific Rim *Rim-speak*.<sup>3</sup> A decade ago, and the “time” had come for the emergence, or rather re-emergence, of the “Indo-Pacific” as “a new template for analysis.”<sup>4</sup> This was a shift westward to bring both the Indian Ocean and India into play, a discourse process that that went from observers and think tanks to a raft of formal government strategies, often tacit China-balancing geopolitically as well as embracing geo-economic potential.

Still more recently, the term “Indo-Mediterranean” has been coined in strategic deliberations, as Italian and Indian leaders proclaimed on May 20, 2026, “we are witnessing the emergence of what might be termed the Indo-Mediterranean”; appropriately headlined by Italian geopolitical think tanks as “Indo-Mediterranean doctrine enters the strategic mainstream.”<sup>5</sup> Maritime stretches are, of course, fluid in their delineation. The Indo-Mediterranean has a broad sense of the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean that would stretch from Singapore to Gibraltar. In practice though, the Indo-Mediterranean has been envisaged as stretching geographically (and, just as significantly, politically) from Italy to the west coast of India. This can be followed in two different senses. First, as the maritime underbelly of West Asia/Middle East—a maritime continuum running from the Eastern Mediterranean–Suez Canal–Red Sea–Arabian Sea. If the Middle East is primarily a land concept, “new geographical frameworks ... particularly the shift toward maritime conceptions of space (Mediterranean, Indian Ocean)” is now generating the Indo-Mediterranean formulation.<sup>6</sup> Second, though, the Indo-Mediterranean can be seen as a mixed sea and land area running from the Eastern Mediterranean–Middle East–Gulf–Arabian Sea.

In this article, the concept and construction of the Indo-Mediterranean is followed through geography-derived applications, various *geos*. First there is geohistory, the history of the term.<sup>7</sup> Next are the geostrategies in and for the Indo-Mediterranean being pursued by India, Turkey and Italy. Finally, are respective applications of geopolitics, geo-economics and geotechnology for understanding the operation of the Indo-Mediterranean.

## II. Geohistory

A starting point for the geohistory of envisaged regions and strategic concepts is Foucault’s critical genealogy of terms; his “Archaeology of knowledge” (*l’Archéologie du savoir*) is on show with his discursive formations, the formation of concepts and the formation of strategies. Foucault’s *Questions of Geography* can be fruitfully applied “to decipher discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power.”<sup>8</sup> The “Indo-Mediterranean” is such a spatial strategic discourse, reflecting power considerations. The power deriving from the ability to shape emergent regional discourse, descriptors and initiatives has been termed *geopower*, generally in critical discourse (Tuathail) and with regard to the Middle East (Kochs).<sup>9</sup> Regions become delineated for states to deploy power in and respond to other states’ deployment of power. Regions are a matter of self-identification and

official public proclamation.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this is why Karen Wigen and Martin Lewis see them as “*metageography*.... the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world”; constructs where “some of the most basic and taken-for-granted ‘regions’ of the world were first framed by military thinkers.”<sup>11</sup> The role of military figures in the formulation of the Indo-Mediterranean term is a recurring theme in this present study.

The term Indo-Mediterranean was first coined in 1879. One was an innocuous mention in Philadelphia by the natural scientist George Washington Tryon, in his *Manual of Conchology* of “that of the Indo-Mediterranean of *Olc. Astierianus*”!<sup>12</sup> A more pointed appearance was Captain (Royal Navy) Verney Cameron’s profile of the merits of a possible “Indo-Mediterranean Railway,” in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in September 1879.<sup>13</sup> This was with regard to the long-running discussions, since the 1830s in Britain, on a railway running from the Mediterranean (Lattakia) down the Euphrates to the Gulf. The strategic context was simple and explicit, a route to India that would serve Britain for trade, communications, and movement of military forces.<sup>14</sup>

After this appearance in 1879–1882, the term “Indo-Mediterranean” dropped out of much use, with strategic coinage virtually out of circulation. The reason why talk of an Indo-Mediterranean Railway project down the Euphrates dropped out of discussion after 1882 was simple: British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and control of the Suez Canal. However, that very British occupation of Egypt and the Suez Canal in 1882 created an ongoing *de facto* maritime-based British-shaped Indo-Mediterranean running from the Mediterranean–Suez Canal–Red Sea–Arabian Sea–India; locationally controlled (places and bases) from Gibraltar–Malta–Cyprus–Egypt–Sudan–Aden–Socotra–Seychelles–Maldives–India.

Gradually, though, the term “Indo-Mediterranean” re-emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, from a now-independent India, with regard to trade patterns. In 1970, Dandekar’s “Indo-Mediterranean” discussed Indo-Mediterranean “contacts” between the Mediterranean and India in ancient times, in Indo-Mesopotamian, India-Anatolian, Indo-Hellenistic and Indo-Roman times.<sup>15</sup> Nagaraju used the term “Indo-Mediterranean commerce” in 1981 about West India trade with the classical world.<sup>16</sup>

This economic hook was picked up 30 years later with the conference *A Tale of Two Worlds: Comparative Perspectives on Indo-Mediterranean Commerce*, organized by Columbia University’s Center for the Ancient Mediterranean in 2011. Speeches delivered were later published in *Across the Ocean: Nine Essays on Indo-Mediterranean Trade*.<sup>17</sup> This usage for a Classical-period economic system has become well established, with continuing research on the mutual agency of actors involved.<sup>18</sup>

Such usage of the term Indo-Mediterranean to denote trading systems from the past has also been picked up by politicians of the present to describe current plans for economic cooperation, particularly with the Indo-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) initiative floated in 2023. Simultaneously, the Indo-Mediterranean was further invoked by think tanks, diplomats and politicians in the converging geostrategic outreach by Italy and India in the 2020s.

### III. Geostrategies

States (and their proxies) continue to be the main actors in and on the Indo-Mediterranean on the oceans, their geostrategies to the fore.<sup>19</sup> Three states within the Indo-Mediterranean have pursued strategies of an Indo-Mediterranean nature, namely India, Turkey and Italy.

### 3.1 India

With regard to India, a significant legacy is British India, where the jurisdiction of New Delhi ran from Bombay over to Aden and the Gulf, a “neo-Curzonian” revival coined by Indian observers to describe India’s current outreach.<sup>20</sup> Before Indian independence, Kavalalam Panikkar, focused on Indian Ocean strategic outreach and seapower tenets in his *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (1940), which deliberately invokes Alfred Mahan’s opus *The Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (1890). Across the Arabian Sea, Panikkar argued:

With the islands of ... Socotra, properly equipped and protected ... security can return to that part of the Indian Ocean which is of supreme importance to India.... Unless, therefore, distant bases like ... Aden and Socotra are firmly held and the naval air arm developed in order to afford sufficient protection to these posts, there will be no security or safety for India.<sup>21</sup>

For the newly independent India, Keshav Vaidya certainly had sweeping maritime hopes in *The Naval Defence of India* (1949), critical geopolitics aspirations to the fore:

We must at least rule the waves of the Indian Ocean. ... Indian Ocean must become an Indian Lake. That is to say, India must be the supreme and undisputed power over the waters of the Indian Ocean ... controlling the waves of that vast mass of water making the Indian Ocean and its two main offshoots, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.<sup>22</sup>

India’s strategic discourse backdrop is an unofficial sense of the Indian Ocean as “India’s Ocean.”<sup>23</sup> Politically, India’s rise has seen an extension of interests, in which a sense of *immediate neighborhood* in South Asia was supplemented by a sense of *extended neighborhood*.<sup>24</sup> Within that extended neighborhood policy, a Look West stance was enunciated, first with regard to the Gulf, but then more widely to the Middle East.

In terms of bases and places, India’s buildup of military facilities on the Lakshadweep Islands projects power further into the Arabian Sea. Further west, privileged port holdings at Chahbahar are counterpoised to China’s position at Gwadar, while India’s port access at Duqum counterpoises China’s base at Djibouti and gives India effective control over both eastern and western flanks of the Arabian Sea.<sup>25</sup> The Indian navy deploys into the Gulf and the Red Sea, now pinpointed as areas of strategic concern under Indian naval doctrine.

This Indian outreach, in turn, has been extended further westward to the Mediterranean, to Israel, Cyprus, Greece and Italy. In 2017, Narendra Modi became the first ever Indian PM to visit Israel, repeating the trip in March 2026. In addressing the Israeli Parliament, he situated cooperation with Israel bilaterally, minilaterally within the I2U2 group (India, Israel, UAE, US) set up in 2020, and multilaterally/regionally within IMEC set up in 2023. Simultaneously in 2023, India’s Adani Group acquired a 70 percent controlling stake in the strategic Mediterranean maritime hub of Haifa, envisaged as IMEC’s window onto the Mediterranean. Strengthening security cooperation with Israel, and now with Greece and Cyprus, has developed a “Mediterranean Arc” that for India serves as a counter to the so-called Turkey-Pakistan “nexus.”<sup>26</sup> The Indian navy now regularly deploys and exercises in the Mediterranean. Modi has established particularly close links with Italy’s Giorgia Meloni (a so-called “Melodi”), invoking earlier history of trade relations with the Roman

Empire but also burgeoning naval cooperation.<sup>27</sup> Modi's trip to Italy in May 2026 had their India-Italy "Indo-Mediterranean axis" very much on show.<sup>28</sup>

India is a strong supporter of the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC), announced in Delhi in 2023. India already proposed a "Cotton Route" in 2015, invoking old trading links with the Roman Mediterranean, to counterbalance (like IMEC) China's Maritime Silk Road initiative announced in 2013.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.2 Turkey

Turkey has established an Indo-Mediterranean presence. Its strategic derivation is two-fold. First is its *Blue Motherland* doctrine, coined in 2006 by the then-division head for the Plans and Policy Division at Turkish Naval Forces headquarters, Admiral Cem Gurdeniz, Turkey's Mahan. Gurdeniz was clear on the nature of the Blue Motherland concept as a catalyst for national change of strategic focus. Citing Spykman's *Rimland* framework, he explained:

The Blue Homeland ... signifies the maritimization of Turkey with its state and nation. It symbolizes a radical change in the dominant understanding of a land state toward the maritime state, thus ensuring the maritimization of the state and people. As a doctrine, it gives the answer to how Turkey should become a maritime state with its people in all areas that give life to maritime power. It is a geopolitical roadmap ... the state should turn its face to the seas ... and focus on blue waters beyond the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>30</sup>

The blue waters pinpointed as "the Mediterranean Sea" will be the door opening to "the Century of Asia and the Sea" for Turkey, opening through the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.<sup>31</sup> A blue-water fleet is consequently under construction amid general naval activism.<sup>32</sup> Second is the Neo-Ottomanism Pan-Islamist nature of Recep Erdoğan's ruling administration, in power since 2003. The Ottoman Empire, in its heyday under Suleiman the Magnificent five hundred years ago, was very much an Indo-Mediterranean power, controlling the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and much of the Gulf, as well as helping Islamic rulers in northwest India.

It is no surprise to note that Erdoğan, at the commissioning ceremony of Turkey's MILGEM (national warship) program in 2011, defined Turkey's blue water interests as "residing in the Suez Canal, the adjacent seas, and from there extending to the Indian Ocean."<sup>33</sup> Under Erdoğan, Turkish military intervention and basing rights have been established in Syria and Libya in the Mediterranean, Sudan in the Red Sea, Qatar in the Gulf, and Somalia on the Indian Ocean littoral—a "string of pearls."<sup>34</sup> Across the Arabian Sea, strong military links have been established with Pakistan, including Turkish naval deployments, which hinder India's attempts to establish regional pre-eminence in these waters.<sup>35</sup> Competitive infrastructure projects are on show. Turkey has rejected the IMEC scheme and instead pursued its own Development Road Project in Iraq down to Basra and frontage on the Gulf, and its Levant Initiative down Jordan to the Gulf of Aqaba and further frontage onto the Red Sea.

### 3.3 Italy

Once unified, encouraged by the *Rivista Marittima* journal of the Italian Navy, modern Italy sought possessions across the Indo-Mediterranean. Libya on the southern shore of

the Mediterranean and the Dodecanese in the eastern Mediterranean<sup>36</sup> were supplemented by colonies down the Red Sea (Eritrea) and Indian Ocean littoral (Somalia). Mussolini, Fascist Italy's "geographer in chief," had argued for Italy breaking free of its Mediterranean chokepoint restrictions, famously comparing British-held Suez as prison bars.<sup>37</sup> Admiral Giuseppe Fioravanzo's *Panorama strategico dell'Oceano Indiano e dell'Oceano Pacifico* (1941) reiterated Roman antecedents but also considered the Mediterranean as extending strategically over to the Arabian Sea.

We intend to solve the problem of our maritime borders once and for all [...] the Mediterranean will return to being the "Mare Nostrum" in the Roman sense of the word [...] The Mediterranean does not end at Suez or even at Bab-el-Mandeb, but rather strategically it ends to the east of the Persian Gulf [i.e. the Arabian Sea] encompassing it all in its vital space [*spazio vitale*].<sup>38</sup>

Italy's push for Egypt and the Suez Canal may have failed in World War II, leading to Italian colonial collapse, but the setting up of the *Limes* geopolitical journal in 1993 coincided with renewed strategic outreach by Italy beyond the Mediterranean, an "Enlarged/Larger Mediterranean" (*Mediterraneo allargato*), for Italy to operate in. There is "the politics of geopolitics" in Italy's "geopolitical imaginary of the Wider Mediterranean."<sup>39</sup> This formulation arose in naval circles in the 1990s and was then written into official documents as a strategic frame of reference and rationale for Italian deployments in the Gulf and in the Red Sea.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the "Extended Mediterranean" has also been further extended eastward across the Arabian Sea to India, as Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni explained in 2016 that "ours is a strategic choice because, [...] when we talk about the 'wider Mediterranean' we must consider that it extends all the way to here [India]."<sup>41</sup>

Meloni, in power since 2022, has pursued re-engagement in and with Libya in the Mediterranean, enjoying warm relations in Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the Red Sea, and established close relations in the Gulf with the UAE and with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), where Meloni accepted a privileged invitation to attend the leaders' summit in 2026. India has been of particular significance in Italy's Indo-Mediterranean strategy, very much on show with Meloni's visit to India in 2023, and the close relationship established with Narendra Modi, dubbed their "Melodi." Successive Italian ambassadors to India have extolled the Italy-India partnership. Vincenzo de Luca penned *Converging Waters: Strategic Partnership in the Enlarged Mediterranean-Indo-Pacific* in 2023.<sup>42</sup> His successor, Antonio Bartoli, drew attention to Italy-India "joint efforts to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Mediterranean," a formulation echoing the US-Japan advocacy elsewhere of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP).<sup>43</sup> Edoardo Rixi, deputy minister of infrastructure, argued that "India and Italy share a common vision of the sea.... we are natural partners in the broader Indo-Mediterranean region.... we shape a new geopolitics of the seas."<sup>44</sup> In that vein, Italian naval deployments, already seen in the Gulf since the 1990s and Gulf of Aden since the 2010s, were further on show with Italian leadership of the EU operation in the Red Sea in 2024. Italian naval deployments across the Arabian Sea to India (and beyond) has also been a new feature since 2023, including the Italian aircraft carrier ITS *Cavour* in 2024.

Italy has strongly supported the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC) concept, seeing itself as its western pillar, and pushing Trieste as a logistics hub for further trade

routing into the Balkans and central Europe. The fact that Italy's leadership uses the term "Cotton Route" as a strategic moniker for IMEC indicates its differentiation from China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR), and instead brings in India both in terms of cotton trade with the Roman Mediterranean and India's own coining of the phrase "Cotton Route" in the previous decade. A degree of rivalry is present with Greece, which has its own hopes for Piraeus' role within China's MSR and the IMEC as the main trade hub for the Balkans. Elsewhere, Minister of Foreign Affairs Tajani's trip to Libya in January 2026 to launch the container terminal at Misurata represented further consolidation of Italy's presence in the Mediterranean.

## IV. Geopolitics

### 4.1 Classical Theorists

Classical geopolitics is a tool for analysis, coined in 1899 by the Swedish observer Rudolph Kjellen as *geopolitik*. It focuses on how a state's placement-location (including shape and access) in a particular region will give it power advantages/disadvantages, and it may be reflected in state policies and strategies designed to maximalize such locational advantages and minimize such locational disadvantages.

Halford Mackinder's view of geopolitical imperatives in 1904 was to emphasize *land-power* able to be generated and deployed from the Eurasian heartland.<sup>45</sup> Admiral Alfred Mahan, in contrast, had already emphasized *seapower* in 1890, able to be generated and deployed from the Mediterranean, Indian and Pacific Oceans.<sup>46</sup> China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with its Eurasian Land Belt and its Maritime Silk Road across the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, have been seen, respectively, as examples of Mackinder and Mahanian logic.<sup>47</sup> Current Indian naval aspirations, especially in the Indian Ocean, can be analyzed through a Mahanist seapower lens.<sup>48</sup> Mahanian-style competition between China and India is evident in the Indian Ocean.<sup>49</sup> China's seapower appearances across the Indian Ocean and into the Mediterranean have generated counter-cooperation and tacit balancing by China-concerned states in the Indo-Mediterranean, notably India and Italy. Edoardo Rixi, Italy's deputy minister of infrastructure, emphasized how "India and Italy ... are natural partners in the broader Indo-Mediterranean. ... That is how we shape a new geopolitics of the seas."<sup>50</sup> Turkey's blue-water operations can be seen as Mahanian.<sup>51</sup> However, Turkey's blue water appearances in the Eastern Mediterranean, Red Sea, Gulf and Arabian Sea have generated similar balancing dynamics, leading to closer cooperation between India and Greece.

Nicholas Spykman's application of geography to international relations took a position between Mackinder and Mahan, with Eurasian Rimland approach in his *Geography of the Peace*, written in 1944. The Indo-Mediterranean was a section of that Rimland, where he noted "since the completion of the Suez Canal that area has been transformed by seapower penetration"; and that the latter "surrounding string of marginal and Mediterranean seas which separates the continent from the oceans constitutes a circumferential maritime highway which links the whole area together in terms of sea power."<sup>52</sup> Spykman's 1950s *Rimland* alliances like NATO, CENTO and SEATO overlapped, with

Turkey being a link between NATO and CENTO and Pakistan being a link between CENTO and SEATO, the latter being renewed in the particular current Rimland nexus between Turkey and Pakistan.

#### 4.2 Location and Space

Location continues to shape state thinking, their *geostrategy*.<sup>53</sup> Politicians, planners and strategists continue to think in geographical space for security purposes: “strategic space” literally and perceptually.<sup>54</sup> Considerations of strategic-space perspectives and policies can be pursued in the Indo-Mediterranean with regard to Turkey, India and Italy.

For Turkey, “geopolitics still matters,” its location being on the maritime Mediterranean/Black Sea and land Balkan/Middle East interfaces.<sup>55</sup> This location, between three continents, Europe, Africa and Asia, has consequences, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, of “Grand Geopolitics for a new Turkey.... a brand-new geopolitical reality that leaves Turkey as the emerging great power in the region.”<sup>56</sup> Turkey’s immediate maritime “geopolitical space” of the Eastern Mediterranean has been extended south down the Red Sea and east across the Gulf—both leading to still further strategic extension across the Arabian Sea.<sup>57</sup>

India and Italy have both emphasized advantages derived from their respective locations in the Mediterranean and Indian Oceans. In this position-as-location sense, India goes deep into the central Indian Ocean, looking not only east and south, but also west across the Arabian Sea. Consequently, the Indian naval leadership talks of how:

India’s regional or immediate geo-strategic environment ... leverage[s] our strategic geography to assert and defend our sovereign interests in the maritime domain ... by virtue of India’s geostrategic location in the Indian Ocean and her maritime capabilities.<sup>58</sup>

In similar fashion, the Italian peninsula runs down the central Mediterranean, leaving Italy looking to the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. As Prime Minister Meloni said:

All of Italy’s long coastlines are bathed in the Mediterranean. ... Geography has shaped our culture, our outward projection ... the “peninsular factor” has given us a crucial resource ... a key advantage, making us natural platforms for trade, logistics. ... For centuries, our maritime flows have looked towards the South and to the rest of the Mediterranean, which remains our natural neighborhood.<sup>59</sup>

India and Italy have recognized their mutual central positions within their respective halves of the Indo-Mediterranean as a further incentive to develop their bilateral cooperation. Common positions have been stressed by Italian diplomats, like Italy’s ambassador to India, Anatolie Bartoli:

As peninsular countries projecting into a shared basin—the Indo-Mediterranean—an increasingly integrated and interdependent space, Italy and India share converging visions and interests.<sup>60</sup>

The Foreign Minister/Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani invoked geography and history, geo-economics and geotechnology, pulling Italy and India together as “natural terminals” for a “common Indo-Mediterranean area”:

Italy and India are linked by history and geography. We have been for centuries natural terminals of a common Indo-Mediterranean area, dating back to the Roman Empire. At the time it was about spices and gold. Today, we are working on connectivity, with projects in ports, logistics, and undersea digital links.<sup>61</sup>

India's Minister for External Affairs Jaishankar reciprocated:

Extending its [India's] reach westward, given both the location and centrality, and the levels of activity, it makes eminent sense to connect the two, what Italy is doing in the Mediterranean and what India is doing in the Arabian Sea, for mutual benefit.<sup>62</sup>

Both Italy and India's sense of mutually extendable neighborhoods converge with the Indo-Mediterranean. Italy's strategic enunciation of an "Enlarged Mediterranean" and India's "Look West" both extend to the Red Sea and then for both states still further beyond—for Italy, further eastward into the Arabian Sea and for India further westward into the Mediterranean. A similar dynamic is unfolding in the Gulf. In effect, Italy and India are coming out toward each other politically and strategically but also physically (locationally) along the Indo-Mediterranean. Meloni and Modi's personal leadership chemistry facilitates this India-Italy "Indo-Mediterranean axis."<sup>63</sup>

#### 4.3. *Critical Geopolitics*

Critical geopolitics is concerned with *position*—not so much classical geopolitics' sense of position as location, but rather position in terms of how a state perceives itself in a region, what does it see its place as deserving, merited and achievable. Achievement is through national policies, played out at times in bilateral, multilateral and regional settings. Such criticality involves state perceptions and images ("geopolitical image-ination"), its hopes and aspirations, its fears and concerns about others in such a region.<sup>64</sup> This aspiration sense of position is on show in the Indo-Mediterranean, with regard to India, Italy and Turkey. Feeding into these critical geopolitics, Agnew and Tuathail point out that "it is through discourse that leaders act, through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings that foreign-policy actions are explained ... through ready-made geographically-infused reasoning."<sup>65</sup> "Discursive transformation" is on show, produced to serve different geopolitical visions that serve to enable, restrict and rationalize different role choices for Turkey in the international system, highlighted with Recep Erdoğan's ascent to power since 2014.<sup>66</sup> Such discursive transformations have also operated with Italy and India with the advent of Meloni and Modi.

Geopolitics is literally political, both in terms of how it is formulated and how it is used as informing state policies for regional and international systems.<sup>67</sup> Geopolitical codes emerge in and from the process of government, representing "governmentality" in a "geo-coded world" (Rose-Redwood), and "intellectual tools for practicing statecraft" (Dijink).<sup>68</sup> Ahmet Davutoglu, as foreign minister and then prime minister of Turkey, coined the phrase "strategic depth" for Turkey and "geopolitical code" underpinning policy toward the Middle East.<sup>69</sup> Turkey's strategic depth was initially deployed across Central Asia (Mackinder-style), but is now also deployed down the maritime stretches of the Indo-Mediterranean (Mahan-style).<sup>70</sup> Italy's "extended Mediterranean" and India's "extended neighborhood" concepts are similar geopolitical codes generating policies and power presence.

## V. Geo-economics

If classical geopolitics concerns itself with states' location, and advantages and political-military power outcomes thereon, geo-economics concerns itself with state access (again a locational, *geo*, matter) to economic resources and economic power outcomes thereon. Economic power in turn underpins states' political and military power. Geo-economics has become a tool of modern geostrategies, as states seek control and access of resources.<sup>71</sup> This is fully on show in the Indo-Mediterranean with China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR), and the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) initiatives, "key instruments of geopolitical competition."<sup>72</sup>

### 5.1. Trade and Energy Flows

Trade corridors are inherently strategic; the Suez Canal in the Indo-Mediterranean can be compared not only with alternative flows across the Indo-Mediterranean with IMEC (via the Arabian peninsula) but also around the Indo-Mediterranean with Northern Sea Route (China's Polar Silk Road), the Trans-Siberian Route (China's Eurasia "Belt," the China-Europe Railways Express) and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) going up from Chabahar.<sup>73</sup> Energy security is certainly in play in the Indo-Mediterranean, where location is crucial for states in obtaining, maintaining and defending supply routes. This was particularly on show with Houthi disruption of the Red Sea throughout 2025 and the closure of the Straits of Hormuz by Iran in 2026, and the search for alternative rerouting.

### 5.2. Infrastructure Routes

Infrastructure routes have become a highly politicized "corridor war" in the Middle East.<sup>74</sup> Infrastructure connectivity is, by its nature, strategic, locationally shaped dots and corridors between places. Sami Moisi's geopolitical analysis of geo-economic practices shows as it "focuses on the political imaginaries that frame the world in terms of economic expansion, new kinds of inter-spatial competition, connectivity."<sup>75</sup> This straddles the world of critical geopolitics (*political imaginaries*) and tangible competition on infrastructure connectivity themes, evident with the IMEC. There is, indeed, a "geopolitics of infrastructure" in which "the new geopolitical contest is between competing infrastructure blocs."<sup>76</sup>

China's Belt and Road (BRI) initiative across Asia is an important infrastructure initiative, underpinning power aggrandizement.<sup>77</sup> Within the BRI, its Eurasian Belt represents Mackinder geopolitics; its Maritime Silk Road component, going across the Indian Ocean and into the Mediterranean represents Mahanian sea focus. For India, there is a "geopolitical weapon of connectivity," as India seeks to insulate itself from "the pressures created by China's expansionist connectivity model."<sup>78</sup> It is no surprise that India under Modi has boycotted the MSR (seeing it as geo-economic encirclement of India for geopolitical purposes by China), and Italy under Meloni pulled out of the MSR in 2022. There is undoubted "geopolitical corridor rivalry" between the MSR and the IMEC initiative.<sup>79</sup>

Ideational and material concerns underpin the IMEC, a "new geography of strategic connectivity in the Indo-Mediterranean."<sup>80</sup> IMEC was announced by India, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia in 2023, reflecting a "geopolitical moment" and "a long strategic

process.”<sup>81</sup> Three stages (maritime-land-maritime) are covered in this Indo-Mediterranean geo-economic initiative. A maritime link is envisaged from India across to the UAE. Overland it then goes across from UAE (Dubai), Saudi Arabia (Al Ghewelfat–Harad–Riyadh–Al Haditha), and Jordan through Israel to Haifa on the Mediterranean coast. Further Mediterranean maritime links were then envisaged. There is debate whether IMEC’s land section across the Arabian Peninsula will complement or compete with the established maritime route through the Suez Canal.

The politics of the project were apparent: “a strategic asset” for its advocates.<sup>82</sup> States not involved in IMEC are an important indicator of IMEC intent and tacit alignments. China, of course, has not been invited, nor has attempted to participate. Turkey has not been invited to IMEC, and has instead pursued its own infrastructure initiatives, shaping overland routes to maritime access. The Development Road Project (DRP) runs from Turkey down Iraq to Basra and the Gulf. One Turkish reviewer sees it as “connectivity projects are not only about logistic convenience ... they envision a new geopolitical design and architecture ... a new geopolitical reality.”<sup>83</sup> Turkey’s Levant initiative goes down from Turkey-Syria-Jordan down to Aqaba on the Red Sea. Both projects, geographically, but also politically, cut across the IMEC proposal.

The politics of IMEC were also on show after the eruption of Israel-Hamas fighting in Gaza during 2024–2025, which for Muslim countries threw the envisaged Mediterranean access at Haifa into question. The announcement in May 2025 of the *Moses Bridge* causeway and railway project across the Strait of Tiran, which links Saudi Arabia to Egypt as a potential replacement for IMEC transit through Israel, is indeed “more than a physical connection, it is a strategic message.”<sup>84</sup>

Amid a fragile and partial ceasefire, Italy, Saudi Arabia and India relaunched the IMEC initiative with increased effort during 2026, but again the US (and Israeli) conflict with Iran in September 2025 and Spring 2026 severely disrupted Gulf traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. The results of the conflict in and around Iran on future Indo-Mediterranean developments, for example on IMEC routage and Gulf/Red Sea energy and trade security, remains to be seen.<sup>85</sup> As one straw in the wind, with the UAE eastern coast in the Gulf under Iranian attack and blockade, the UAE sought to switch routage to its western coast on the Indian Ocean littoral, at Fujairah, where shipping can freely access, and from where pipelines are being laid down overland to help their own and Saudi and Kuwaiti oil output to sidestep the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>86</sup>

## VI. Geotechnology

Some have argued we are in “the new era of geo-technology,” one in which questions of location (where technology is applied, and its impact there), and power (who controls the technology, who benefits from the technology) is in play.<sup>87</sup>

### 6.1 Geotechnology Theory

Friedrich Ratzels, the German “Father of Geopolitics,” picked up on the role of geo-technology in his *Politische geographie* (1903), chapter 16, *Der Verkehr als Raumbewaltiger*

“Transport/Communications [*Verkehr*] as a ‘space master’ [*Raumbewaltiger*].” In this connection, control of Indo-Mediterranean routes has long been a state imperative.

215. The Relocation of Transportation Routes [*Verkehrswege*].

The relocation of a transportation route thus becomes a major political and geographical fact. ... Two millennia ago ... provides the first historical example of a forced rerouting of a global trade route: the diversion of Indian-Mediterranean trade from the Persian Gulf and the Euphrates to the Red Sea and the Nile. Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans enforced this rerouting. ... For the Ottoman Empire, the same process threatened to repeat itself with the relocation of the remnants of the old trade routes to India through the Suez Canal. ... The opening of the Suez Canal marked the beginning of an unstoppable decline for Syria and Mesopotamia, a decline that only railway connections to the Persian Gulf can reverse. ...

215 Transport and Strategy. The development of transport routes is driven by military needs.<sup>88</sup>

## 6.2 Transport Technologies (Railways, Canals)

Railway technology immediately impacted communications flows; the Alexandria to Suez railway line that opened in 1858 made overland transit of the Isthmus of Suez easier. Railway technology, of course, underlays the push for an Indo-Mediterranean Railway down the Euphrates valley, with the Berlin to Baghdad and Basra scheme being feared from Germany at the start of the twentieth century.

The single biggest technological change was the construction of the Suez Canal, which opened in 1869 and revolutionized trade and communication with Europe to India almost overnight, making the old route round Africa and the Cape of Good Hope somewhat redundant. The opening of the Suez Canal was significant in removing overland obstructions (the Isthmus of Suez), recognized at the time that “this Canal has, in fact, turned the Red Sea into an arm of the Mediterranean.”<sup>89</sup> The Suez Canal was of political as well as technological consequence. Politics of technology was on show in 1882 when British occupation of Egypt established British control of the canal, long sought for explicitly imperial purposes of protecting the route to India.<sup>90</sup> The Suez Crisis of 1956 witnessed the reversal of political fortunes, as Britain failed in its attempt to reverse Nasser’s nationalization of the Canal through the dispatch of military forces.

Infrastructure competition between types of technology was on show for Alfred Mahan, the advocate of marine geopolitics and seapower. Applying his own particular geopolitical bent, he argued in 1902 that the maritime route via Suez remained superior to the overland railway route down the Euphrates, which had been mooted at various points in the nineteenth century:

There exists now the sea route by Suez, which is, and probably must remain, supreme to all others. Alternative to it, in part of the way, the future will doubtless bring railways. ... Between them and the Suez route there will be the perennial conflict between land and water transport, between natural and artificial conditions, in which the victory is likely to rest, as heretofore, with Nature’s own highway, the sea.<sup>91</sup>

The installation of a second lane for the Suez Canal in 2015, with further deepening and widening in the Southern sector in 2021 to create an 82 km. parallel channel,

represented significant infrastructure upgrade, dramatically reducing transit times from 16–18 hours down to 11 hours.

### 6.3 Communication Cables

Cables first came to the Indo-Mediterranean for strategic reasons as Britain sought to establish telegraphic communication between London and British India. Overland cables were established in 1865 running from Constantinople, through Baghdad, Basra, Fao and Karachi. These were superseded in 1870 with new maritime cables, coming from Malta-Alexandria, then overland to Suez to run down the Red Sea, where John Pender's British India Submarine Telegraph Company which was able to lay the submarine cable from Aden to Bombay.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century and the Information Revolution had arrived. Cem Gurdeniz noted how "data lines under the sea were becoming the new geopolitical veins of states."<sup>92</sup> Two digital schemes have been rolled out. First the IMEWE (India–Middle East–Western Europe) 13,000-kilometer high-capacity optic submarine cable, launched in in 2010, links Marseilles to Bombay via the Red Sea to secure broadband connectivity. A decade later and it was the turn of the EU–Africa–India Digital Corridor, announced in 2020, to provide ultra-high-speed data connectivity. The Blue–Raman cable system is composed of two cable legs. The *Blue* (developed by Italian Sparkle company) cable in the Mediterranean goes through France, Italy (Brindisi), Greece and Israel with overland routing to the Jordan's Red Sea port of Aqaba Digital Hub, while the *Raman* (named after the Indian Nobel Laureate Venkata Raman) leg carries on the connection from Aqaba down the Red Sea/Saudi Arabia to Djibouti, Oman and across to Mumbai.

However, seabed security issues were on show in the 2024 Red Sea cable cuts that temporarily affected 25 percent of India's internet connectivity. Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea saw the *Raman* Project disrupted during 2025, though May 2026 witnessed the Aqaba Digital Hub receiving loans (US \$14.1 million) for its expansion. National rivalries are also in play. China's PEACE (Pakistan and East Africa Connecting Europe) initiative, a rival digital corridor within China's Digital Silk Road portfolios, aims to run from Gwadar in Pakistan across the Indian Ocean to Djibouti, up the Red Sea to Egypt and then the Mediterranean, bypassing India and providing China with extra surveillance capabilities and port presence.<sup>93</sup>

## VII. Conclusions

If we stand back, certain patterns concerning Indo-Mediterranean processes are apparent. Locational factors are common across national geostrategies of India, Italy and Turkey and within the application of geopolitics, geo-economics and geotechnology to the Indo-Mediterranean.

Indeed the importance of locational imperatives is why the argument by Luttwak that geopolitics is being replaced by geo-economics, his picture of states "impelled by the bureaucratic urges of role-preservation and role-enhancement to acquire a 'geo-economic' substitute for their decaying geopolitical role," has not come to pass.<sup>94</sup> Instead, states across

the Indo-Mediterranean are using geo-economic locational advantages and strategies to give themselves power and leverage. Deborah Cowen and Neil Smith argued that there is “the erosion of geopolitical calculation and the rise of the geo-economic,” but in fact geo-economic calculation, through its locational embedding, is part of geopolitical perspectives.<sup>95</sup> Wigell quite correctly considered that geoeconomics was “the geostrategic use of economic power.”<sup>96</sup>

Globalization indeed facilitates transnational modes of production but also the importance of trade routes. From that, freedom of navigation and chokepoint security issues are evident in the Indo-Mediterranean, most notably the Bab el-Mandeb (Red Sea) and the Strait of Hormuz (Gulf).<sup>97</sup> Iran’s “chokepoint warfare” was certainly on show in Spring 2026 when it closed the Strait of Hormuz, “weaponizing connectivity.”<sup>98</sup>

Geo-technology is a useful addition to the *geo* family of theories, not just a subset of geo-economics but rather showing distinctive features of locational politics, “politicking” in the diplomatic and defense domains. Infrastructure competition was particularly noticeable, not only in the past with the maritime Suez Canal versus the overland Euphrates railway, but also in the present. This current infrastructure competition brings in geo-economic balance through reducing economic dependencies (on China’s MSR) via alternative arrangements and initiatives like IMEC.<sup>99</sup>

Talk of power and balancing is very much the domain of IR realism. Interstate competition and counter-balancing patterns counterpoise the emerging India–UAE–Israel–Greece–Cyprus grouping with the Pakistan–Qatar–Turkey grouping, in parallel with the particularly strong bilateral pillars established between India and Italy. IR realism is also noticeably reflected in infrastructure rivalries, involving India and Italy’s hopes of IMEC acting as a counterbalance to China’s Maritime Silk Route, and in which Turkey’s infrastructure schemes locationally (and politically) cuts across the IMEC initiative.

Conversely, classic regionalism theory of institutional region-building and economic integration is not particularly applicable, at present, to the Indo-Mediterranean. Institutional “Indo-Mediterranean” region-building is instead, again, presently shaped on antagonistic minilaterals, and economic integration is hampered by these rival corridor wars and rival infrastructure initiatives. The Indo-Mediterranean is perhaps then not so much a region but rather a “strategic space,” within which IR realism and various geo-related theories are currently in vigorous play.

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## Biographical Statement

David Scott is a prolific author ([www.d-scott.com/publications](http://www.d-scott.com/publications)), having written extensively on maritime geopolitics, Indian Ocean and Red Sea issues, and Indo-Pacific strategies. He is a member and writer for the Center for International Maritime Security and an associate member of the Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies.

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